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Shakespeare on Film: Through the Lens of a Narrative Theory

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SHAKESPEARE ON FILM
THROUGH THE LENS OF
NARRATIVE THEORY

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Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Although Shakespeare's plays have been the subject of thousands of film adaptations and thoroughly interpreted within the sub-field of Shakespeare on Film, they have rarely been considered in relation to narrative theory. Viewing the films in this context sheds light on the process by which early modern dramatic dialogue and action is reshaped for the screen. Building on the work done by narrative theorists, particularly those addressing the issues of film (including H. Porter Abbott, Mieke Bal, Roland Barthes, David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Seymour Chatman, Gerard Genette, David Herman, Suzanne Keen, Susan Onega, Gerald Prince and Marie-Laure Ryan), this dissertation focuses on the way changes occur at the levels of the *syuzhet* (the order of the events in a particular narration) and how this interacts with a film's *style* (the way events are communicated in a specific medium). The impact of these changes on the *fabula* (the events of a story reconstructed in chronological order) is then assessed to ascertain how the films alter the way the stories are interpreted.

This thesis also uses quantitative measurements to establish not only how much text is utilised but also where specific cuts occur. By transcribing the original text of Shakespeare's plays - and the spoken dialogue of specific films - into *Final Draft* screenwriting software, the precise temporal positioning of the key story events can be identified. Differences that might not otherwise be easily perceptible are also highlighted; these include changes to role size, words per speech, shares of dialogue and areas of textual cutting. These findings will inform further qualitative analysis using the traditional techniques of close reading. My methodology illuminates the way changes have been made at the

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macro and micro levels of narrative, adding something new to the resources currently available to teachers of Shakespeare and to filmmakers.

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INTRODUCTION

Although Shakespeare's plays have been the subject of thousands of film adaptations and have been thoroughly interpreted within the sub-field of Shakespeare on Film, they have rarely been considered in relation to narrative theory. Viewing the films in this context sheds light on the process by which early modern dramatic dialogue is reshaped for the screen. Building on the work done by narrative theorists, particularly those addressing the issues of film (including H. Porter Abbott, Mieke Bal, Roland Barthes, David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Seymour Chatman, Gerard Genette, David Herman, Suzanne Keen, Susan Onega, Gerald Prince and Marie-Laure Ryan), this dissertation focuses on the way changes occur at the levels of the *syuzhet* (the order of the events in a particular narration) and how this interacts with a film's *style* (the way events are communicated in a specific medium). The impact of these changes on the *fabula* (the events of a story reconstructed in chronological order) is then assessed to ascertain how the films alter the way the stories are interpreted.

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inform further qualitative analysis using the traditional techniques of close reading. My methodology illuminates the way changes have been made at the macro and micro levels of narrative, adding something new to the resources currently available to teachers of Shakespeare and to filmmakers.

Given that context, the specific aim of this research project is to find a way of mapping the changes that have been made to Shakespeare's plays, in the process of their adaptation for film, to provide new insights. The decision to use narrative theory as a vehicle for this analysis is based upon the fact that, despite beginning as a way of analysing verbal narratives, the theoretical field has proven flexible enough to extend its methodological concepts across media. As Marie-Laure Ryan points out, narrative may be thought of as a 'fuzzy set', with the implication that, although the 'fullest implementation' is in terms of language, narrative can be studied across other media. This concept of a 'fuzzy set' in the context of narrative is based on the idea that there is a tension between creating a definition that is either too narrow or too broad to be meaningful. Narrative as a 'fuzzy set' is, therefore, defined as having 'a solid core of properties, but accepting various degrees of membership, depending upon which properties a candidate displays [...] certain texts will be unanimously regarded as narratives, such as fairy tales or conversational stories about personal experience, while others will encounter limited acceptance: postmodern novels, computer games, or historical studies of cultural issues, such as Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*'.¹

One implication of the 'fuzzy set' concept is that the traditional idea of a communicative structure involving 'a narrator, narratee and narrative message, in

¹ David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 345.

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addition to sender (author) and receiver (reader, spectator etc.)' may need to be adapted. This thought leads to a transmedial conception of narrative, which is that:

... narrative is a medium-independent phenomenon and, though *no medium is better suited* than language to make explicit the logical structure of narrative, it is possible to study narrative in its non-verbal manifestations *without applying the communicative model of verbal narration* (italics added).²

Seymour Chatman concurs that narratives can be transmedial, quoting Bremond who writes that a story “may be transposed from one to another medium without losing its essential properties’. Chatman goes on to say that the ‘transposability of the story is the strongest reason for arguing that narratives are indeed structures independent of any medium’.³ It is clear then that whilst narrative may have begun as a verbal activity, there are theoretical arguments that support the idea that it can be used transmedially; this makes the use of narrative theory feasible as a basis for discussing the adaptation of early modern drama onto film.

A further justification for this theoretical framework is that it has a well-developed set of analytical models for use at both micro and macro levels. As Suzanne Keen observes, ‘Narrative theory provides an extremely detailed vocabulary for the description of the component parts and various functions of narrative’.⁴ This means that ‘precise observations about the handling of the formal qualities of narrative can easily be combined with many other modes of

² Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Introduction' in Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), *Narrative Across Media : The Languages of Storytelling*, (Lincoln, Neb. ; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), pp. 1-40 (p.15).

³ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse : Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 20.

⁴ Suzanne Keen, *Narrative Form*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 6.

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criticism'.⁵ This combination of flexibility, precision and compatibility with other criticism offers further justification for using narrative theory as a means of analysing Shakespeare in play and film form.

Ryan does warn, however, that there are slightly different terminologies for describing narrative in film as opposed to literature and that care needs to be taken when using terms such as time, order, duration, anachrony, analepsis, prolepsis, homodiegesis, heterodiegesis, hypotheses, schemata etc.; in this context the terms will not, therefore, be used interchangeably but in a consistent fashion to avoid confusion.

If the aim is to compare the early modern plays of Shakespeare and the modern films based on them, the next question is who might be interested and why? The thought informing the research is that many people, especially schoolchildren and university students, are first exposed to Shakespeare on screen rather than the theatre. If this is the case, then these audiences will surely be interested to know to what degree the films correlate with the plays; do they merely re-set the stories in another period or milieu (as frequently happens in the theatre) or are changes made in the order of the events or the number of words used? If changes are made, how substantial are they, do they affect certain characters more than others, or are particular phases of the stories more vulnerable to change or deletion? In addition, the findings will be of interest to filmmakers who can gauge the effect of the various changes that have been made in these films, with the aim of helping to inform the choices they make when conceiving their own Shakespeare-related projects.

⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

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It will also be helpful to create a model with which to assess any changes at both a quantitative and qualitative level. To address the quantitative issue both the plays and the films to be researched have been transcribed into *Final Draft* screenwriting software. This provides a range of data including the characters' shares of dialogue, the number of times characters speak, the number of words they speak and the scenes in which they appear. This makes possible detailed comparisons between Shakespearean play texts and the film adaptations of the plays. This methodology delivers quantitative insights (such as the percentage of text cut by scene and by act) that are not otherwise available.

The choice was also made to transcribe the play texts from one consistently edited source, albeit various film directors may have used variant texts for their adaptations. The reasoning is that because approximately 60% of a play text is normally cut for a two-hour film, the importance of individual word variants is not the type of issue that would require comparisons between particular copy-texts. As a result, the decision was taken to have a consistent reference point with which to draw comparisons. There are, clearly, a number of textual editions available with differing virtues but the *Norton Shakespeare* was selected as the basic 'original' text of the plays.⁶ This decision was made on the basis that the project is partly predicated on its usefulness to teachers, students and filmmakers; therefore a scholarly edition with large numbers of readers in the English-speaking world was thought to be ideal.

A different issue arose when it came to transcribing the film versions of the plays into *Final Draft*. There were two main options: one was to copy the description and dialogue from published screenplays; the second was to

⁶ Stephen Greenblatt and others, *The Norton Shakespeare: International Student Edition*, 1st edn (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

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transcribe the dialogue from the soundtrack of the DVD versions of the films. The latter course was chosen for two main reasons: the first is that published screenplays are not always available for all Shakespeare films; the second is that published screenplays (even shooting script versions) are often different from the final cut of the film. As the emphasis here is on making comparisons between the original text and what is actually used in the film – rather than comparing film and screenplay – the solution chosen was to use DVD soundtracks supplemented by the subtitles where pronunciation was unclear.

This part of the methodology can deliver the basis for quantitative comparisons to be made between plays and films, but there still remains a qualitative issue in relation to story structure. Do Shakespeare's plays use a similar story structure to modern film stories? If not, what model do they use and how does it differ from the most likely story models that that relative Shakespeare neophytes might use to try and comprehend the plays on film? In this context, it is argued here that one of the schemas that new audiences will use to interpret the stories is classical Hollywood film structure: because this is a format that has become familiar worldwide. This is not to suggest that those watching mainstream films can necessarily name the specific techniques being used by the filmmakers, or articulate the features of a three- four- or five-act structure. The assertion here is that the classical storytelling model is intuitive to most audiences (at least in the Western world) because they have been exposed to this format for most of their lives. It may, therefore, be a useful starting point to begin to analyse and think about the differences between this model and Shakespeare's plays, and also the films based upon those plays. How similar are the plays to the classical Hollywood model and how are they different; do the

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films of the plays remain consistent with Shakespearean story structure or do they show signs of being restructured for the screen; and how might these comparisons be helpful in comprehending not only the adapted stories but the originals?

It must also be made clear at this point what this thesis does not seek to achieve. It does not compare or contrast the films and plays in order to judge fidelity to the source. In addition, it does not seek to establish a direct consonance between a textual grammar and a screen grammar that might hope to replicate, in some fashion, the original text of Shakespeare. The working assumption here is that the stage play and the film are separate and equally valid works of art. In this sense the thesis adopts H. Porter Abbott's approach in saying that 'adaptation across media is not translation in anything but the loosest sense' and that adaptors 'don't copy, they steal what they want and leave the rest'.⁷ As a result, the focus will be placed on the way Shakespeare and filmmakers choose to structure their stories, and what these comparisons reveal.

Having established the basic rationale for using narrative theory to compare Shakespeare films with the classical Hollywood model, **Chapter One** reviews the critical literature in the area of narrative theory on film, with a particular focus on the key narrative variables that might be used to compare the stage plays and the films. It should be noted that Chapter One does not review the scholarly literature relating to Shakespeare on Film: this will be included at the beginning of Chapters Two to Five, which deal with four separate films (see below for details). This approach is designed to set the research findings for each play/film in the context of film-specific scholarly research to-date.

⁷ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 112.

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The next two chapters then look at the large-scale changes (to themes and character groups in particular) that occur in two different films: **Chapter Two** focuses on Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* (1996), whilst **Chapter Three** analyses Julie Taymor's *Tempest* (2010). The final two chapters then take a slightly different approach and compare the micro- and macro-scale changes made in two versions of *Hamlet* filmed in the final decade of the last century: **Chapter Four** focuses on Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) whilst **Chapter Five** looks at Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000). This proposal means that the films are not considered in the order in which they were produced and released into the cinema. This decision has been taken on the basis that Chapters Two and Three analyse two very different plays on film – one written towards the beginning of Shakespeare's career and one written towards the end. In contrast, Chapters Four and Five compare two films of a single play. As such, this ordering seems to make more sense. Each of the chapters will begin (as indicated above) with a brief review of scholarly writing on the specific films and plays before presenting the relevant research findings – covering issues such as the structural changes and their thematic and interpretational implications. The **Conclusion** then draws these findings and suggests ways in which the research methodology might be useful in future applications.

CHAPTER ONE

NARRATIVE THEORY, SHAKESPEARE, AND FILM

The Subdivisions of Narrative

Having suggested the benefits of a transmedial narrative approach in the Introduction, the first objective is to specify how the language of narrative theory can be applied to make meaningful comparisons between stage and film. What is immediately clear is that the term narrative has several different parameters, with Genette highlighting three in particular: the first is the idea that narrative is a ‘statement, the *oral* or *written* discourse that undertakes *to tell* of an event or a series of events’ (italics added); second, it can mean ‘*the succession of events, real or fictitious, that are the subjects of [a] discourse, and to their several relations of linking, opposition, repetition, etc.*’ (italics added); the third meaning is ‘the event that consists of *someone* recounting something: *the act of narrating taken in itself*’ (italics added).⁸ These distinctions have been given a specific literary nomenclature, which defines *discours* as the text or utterance, *histoire* as the events narrated, and *narration* as the act itself.

Seymour Chatman picks up the latter two categories and highlights a further distinction between *histoire* and *discours*, writing that:

Structuralist theory argues that each narrative has two parts: a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse

⁸ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse : An Essay in Method*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980), p. 26.

(*discours*), that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated.⁹

This definition of *histoire* thus includes not only the succession of events but also the setting and characters. This synthesis is noted here because the later discussion elaborates upon the various elements of narrative that are subsequently separated for further analysis.

Chatman also observes that the Russian Formalists distinguished between story and its expression, noting their use of the terms *fabula* for ‘basic story stuff, the sum total of events to be related in the narrative’ and *sjuzet* as ‘the story as actually told by linking the events together’.¹⁰ Here there is a further separation of the events and ways in which they are linked together. Sternberg then refines these categories, distinguishing story from *fabula* and plot from *syuzhet*.¹¹ He points out that story is conceived as basically chronological and additive. Here the events are basically conjoined by the phrase “and then”, without any presupposition that there is any causal connection between those events. The *fabula*, like story, is also chronological but in addition is linked by causal relationships. Plot can be the arrangement of events in a chronological or non-chronological order and is also linked by cause and effect. Lastly, *syuzhet* has a variable order of presentation, is rarely chronological, can be additive and/or causal and/or spatial.¹² In other words, the terms story and *fabula* are not interchangeable, nor are plot and *syuzhet*. These are useful distinctions to bear in mind because the main focus of this thesis will be to explore the differing ways

⁹ Chatman, p. 19.

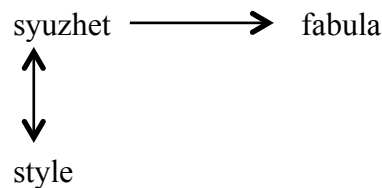
¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 19-20.

¹¹ There are various spellings of *sjuzet/syuzhet*: this thesis (from here onwards) standardizes the spelling as *syuzhet* for convenience and consistency.

¹² Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*, (Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 13.

in which the syuzhet is expressed on stage and on film and how this does (or does not) affect the fabula (the events in chronological order connected by cause and effect).

The way a story is told on film also involves a separate narrative element that David Bordwell calls *style*, which is ‘the film’s systematic use of cinematic devices’. In a narrative film the distinction to be drawn is that the syuzhet represents the ‘dramaturgical’ process (order), whilst style represents the ‘technical’ possibilities (camera angles, staging, casting, lighting etc.).¹³ He provides this simple diagram to show the relationship:



Although these two systems co-exist there is often a hierarchical relationship between syuzhet and style. Bordwell writes that ‘film technique is *customarily* used to perform syuzhet tasks – providing information, cueing hypotheses, and so forth. In the “normal” film the syuzhet controls the stylistic system – in Formalist terms, the syuzhet is the “dominant”’ (*italics added*).¹⁴

This is not to argue that style has no effect or that it cannot ever be prioritised over the syuzhet. Different stylistic techniques (close-ups, deep focus, a choice of specific objects to film) ‘may have different effects on the spectator’s perceptual and cognitive activity. Style is thus a notable factor in its own right’.¹⁵ Abbott also points out that in film ‘much of the burden of narration is non-verbal, borne largely by the camera (the angles, duration, and sequencing of what it sees)

¹³ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and not uncommonly by music.¹⁶ In addition, the image itself can be privileged over its role in elucidating the chain of cause and effect (for example in ‘art films’).

In fact, one of the main differences between film and other narrative media is ‘the degree to which the presence of visual imagery absorbs attention’.¹⁷ This occurs because cinema simply cannot avoid precise representations of visual detail. As Chatman points out, this means that elements that might remain ‘*unbestimmt* [indeterminate] in verbal narrative, must be *bestimmt* on a film’.¹⁸ This creates the paradoxical situation that a shot may be full of detail yet no one detail is necessarily picked out, as might happen in a verbal text. For example, where a novelist might mention a man entering a room and leave many of the details of that room to the imagination of the reader, a film must show a particular man, whilst the room and its contents must be fully realised in space and time. Two things emerge here: first, film contains far more detail but is less focused than a written or verbal text; second, film is also more detailed yet less focused than the stage, with the latter often leaving extensive aspects of setting to the imagination of the spectator.

Not only does film offer almost innumerable pieces of visual data, it also offers an immense variety of ways of viewing that data. Chatman visualises the variables offered by film in the diagram on the following page.¹⁹ What can be seen, even in this highly simplified diagram, is that the potential range of visual and auditory combinations is very considerable. One could, for example, further

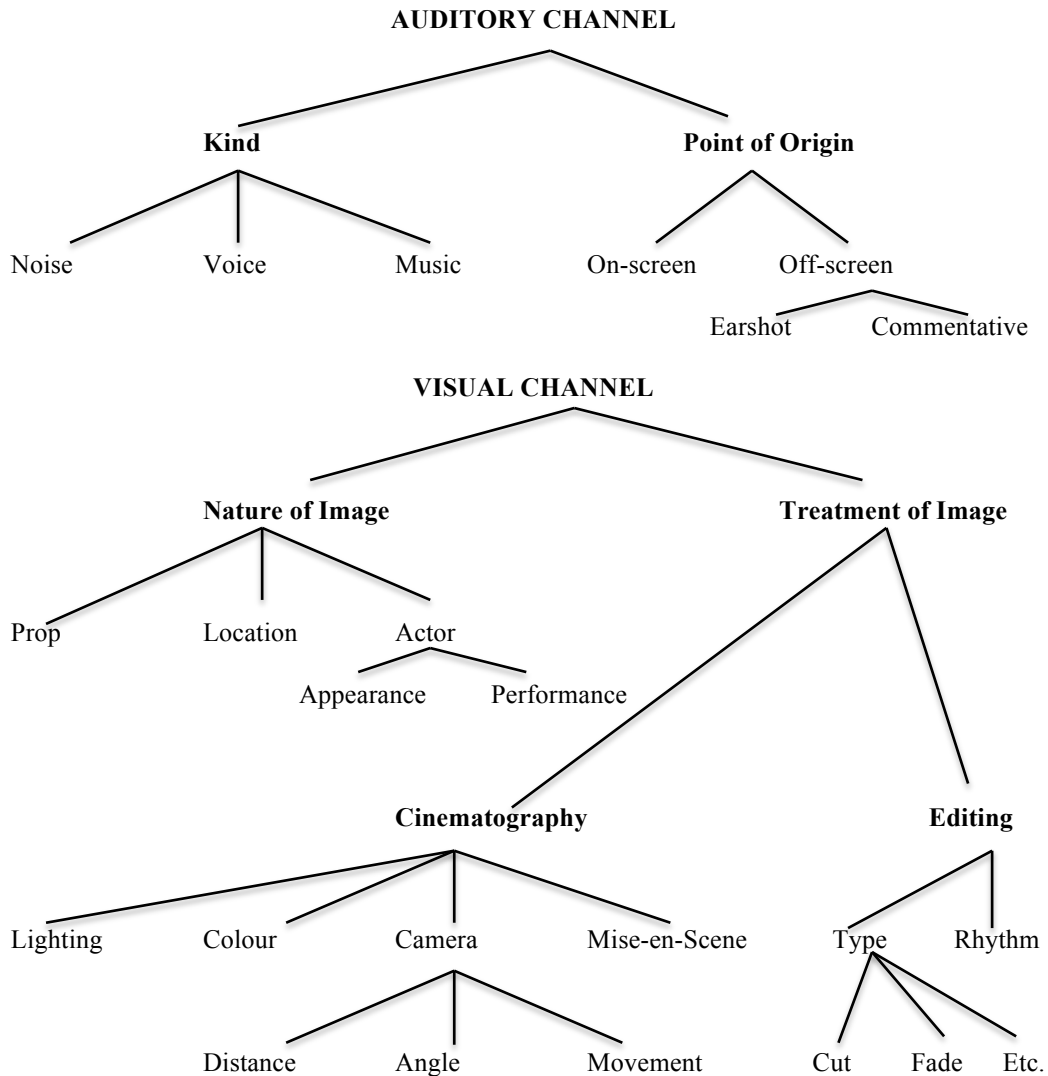
¹⁶ H Porter Abbott, ‘Story, plot, and narration’ in David Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 39-51 (p.49).

¹⁷ Abbott, p. 79.

¹⁸ Chatman, p. 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 134-5.

subdivide any of the categories below. Taking just one of these (Cinematography/Camera/Distance) it could be divided into long-shot, mid-shot, medium-close-up, close-up, extreme close-up etc.; any of these shots could then be combined with a variety of camera angles and movements – low shot, high shot, dolly, pan, tilt etc.



In comparison the focus of the viewer of a stage performance has relatively fewer pieces of data to look at; this, in turn, enables a greater emphasis to be placed on the auditory channel, and particularly the voice.

Spatial

Consideration of the multifarious ways in which the visual and the auditory can be combined by the filmmaker leads naturally on to another important variable: space. On stage and on film events must be represented as occurring in a spatial frame of reference, however, vague or abstract. The syuzhet can facilitate construction of space 'by informing us of the relevant surroundings and the positions and paths assumed by the story's agents'.²⁰ Bordwell goes on to say that 'armed with the notion of different narrative principles and the concept of the syuzhet's distortion of fabula information, we can begin to account for the concrete narrational work of any film'.²¹ What is of particular relevance to this thesis is that:

verbal and cinematic narratives share an agile fluidity in depicting space not available to the traditional stage. In the classic stage-play a single set may suffice for a scene, an act or even a whole play. Dialogue alone will imply "other parts". Further, the relation of the characters' distance, angle of vision, and so on are relatively fixed [...] in film we can literally (and in novel figuratively) see the very pores of a character's face if the camera wishes to exhibit them.²²

In cinematic space Chatman suggests there are five variables that extend the way space is perceived and guide comprehension:²³

1. Scale or size – of the shot and the figures within it
2. Contour, texture, and density – shapes, quality of clothing
3. Position
4. Degree, kind and area of reflected illumination and colour - lighting
5. Clarity or degree of optical resolution – focus

²⁰ Bordwell, p. 51.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Chatman, p. 105.

²³ Ibid. pp. 96-102.

In comparison to theatre, the major differences in film tend to reside in variables 1 and 5 – scale and focus. However, although the cinema allows for a great deal more variation of space, and the depiction of aspects of entities within that space, the plenitude of data also creates potential problems. If the cinematic story loses its grip on the viewer then the attention is free to wander to a wide range of objects within the frame. This makes the *syuzhet* (the ordering of events in and through time linked via cause and effect) relatively more important in mainstream film. In addition, there is the issue that what is seen on the screen is not necessarily commensurate with the meaning of the text it is visualising. Thinking, for example, about the mention of a sunrise in *Hamlet* (1.1 – ‘the morn in russet mantle clad’) – the cinema can offer an enormous amount of realistic detail, but it is mainly denotative whereas the Shakespearean text is connotative. As Chatman points out, ‘the cinema cannot *describe* in the strict sense of the word, that is, arrest the action. It can only “let be seen”’.²⁴ This may seem like an overly pedantic distinction, but if a filmmaker were to suggest (as some have) that Shakespeare was an incipient screenwriter, born before his time, this single example illustrates that there are semantic differences between the film and stage modes.

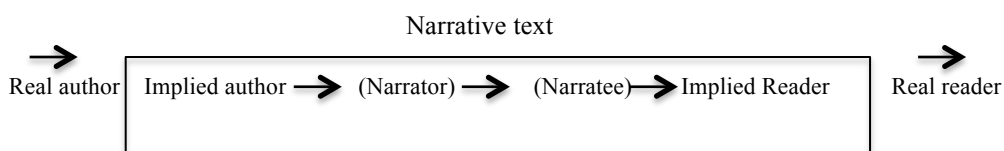
Do films have “narration” rather than a narrator?

What is clear from the above discussion is that narrative theory has a series of distinctions that allow for events to be recounted in different media – by virtue of the fact that the events, their ordering and their portrayal can be placed into separate categories for analysis. However, these distinctions do not address the

²⁴ Ibid. p. 106.

question of who does the narrating in stage plays and in film, or whether this might be relevant to a discussion of Shakespeare on film.

Marie-Laure Ryan outlines the idea of the narrator in verbal and textual narratives being part of a chain of communication from the *real author* at one end of the process to the *real reader* at the other. The chart (below) visualises these relationships and is reproduced from Monika Fludernik's book *An Introduction to Narratology*.²⁵



The interest from a Shakespeare on film perspective is that, on the stage, it is still somewhat easier to construct the idea of Shakespeare as the real and implied author: there is an awareness that he wrote the play for the theatre, and that the text is often (although not always) largely reproduced from scholarly editions of the text in the order that it was published. Clearly, different directors, actors and set designers will apply their individual interpretations to the plays, but it is still relatively obvious that the real and implied author is Shakespeare. In the case of a narrative film, attempting to attribute authorship is not as straightforward. In a highly collaborative (and sometimes highly industrialised) process it is more difficult to determine who constitutes the real author, the implied author, or the narrator.²⁶ Who might be constructed as the entity who produced the film or who is conveying a message? Of course the director is clearly important in film and her or his personal style may be highly influential. Nevertheless, other authorial

²⁵ Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 106.

²⁶ I have put to one side any questions of collaborative authorship on the early modern stage (see for example, Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays*). In this context the discussion is around whether an implied author *might* theoretically be constructed rather than debating authorship in particular.

influences are at play in the production process – for example, the screenwriter, producer, cinematographer and editor to name but a few. In addition, as discussed earlier, film offers a wider variety of settings and angles on the action than are possible in the theatre.

Bordwell also points out that the traditional model of narrative (including the stage play) presupposes a communicator having something to communicate to someone. In contrast, he argues that looking for an author, an ‘enunciator’ or a ‘speaker’ of a film, is difficult because of the loose connection between ‘verbal deixis and the techniques of cinema’. He goes on to stress that ‘in watching films, we are seldom aware of being told something by an entity resembling a human being’. As a result, he argues that the theoretical construct of implied author is unnecessary because: ‘no trait we could assign to an implied author of a film could not be more simply ascribed to *the narration* itself’ (italics added). In other words, it is not necessary to create the idea of an implied author for film and so Bordwell prefers the idea of a ‘narration’, which is the ‘organization of a set of cues for the construction of a story.’²⁷

Seymour Chatman resists this idea of an impersonal narration, arguing that the concept of an implied author does have value because somebody must be involved in the creation of the narrative. His view is that Bordwell’s theory ‘goes too far in arguing that film has no agency corresponding to the narrator’.²⁸ He justifies his view by writing that ‘a film – already “organized” – somehow gets to the theater and gets projected; *something* gets “sent”’. As a result, Chatman suggests that the implied author is just as necessary in the cinema because ‘films,

²⁷ Bordwell, p. 62.

²⁸ Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms : The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 124.

like novels, present phenomena that cannot otherwise be accounted for, such as the discrepancy between what the cinematic narrator presents and what the film as a whole implies.'²⁹

This dispute over implied author versus narration is a theoretical problem that can be relatively easily articulated and understood, but not easily resolved. Bordwell is correct insofar as neither a narrator nor an author tends to be overtly perceived in films; yet Chatman is also right to argue that human beings have not only crafted the events on screen but also have an attitude towards the communication. In addition, when thinking of Shakespeare on film it is clear that a significant implied and historical author, albeit more shadowy than the stage version, retains a degree of influence over the story creation process.

In light of these contradictory positions, the intention here is to choose one of these constructions within which to frame the discussion (either a *narrator* or a *narration*). The choice here is to adopt Bordwell's concept of narration on the basis that analysis of the films and plays will be primarily focused on what is presented on the screen versus what is presented in the play. This is not to preclude discussion of the thematic changes, messages or interpretations that might be attached to a particular director, but that they won't be described in strictly authorial terms. In addition, with the exception of this disagreement, Chatman argues that Bordwell's theory of narrative in film is 'close to my own', writing that:

we both want to argue that film does belong in a general narratology; we both want to argue that films are narrated, and not necessarily by a human voice. We differ chiefly in *the kind of agency we propose for the*

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 130-1.

narrative transmission (italics added). It comes down, as I say, to the difference between "-tion" and "-er" and 'only the implied author can be said to "know", because the implied author has invented it all.³⁰

One further point to emphasise is that (as noted by Chatman above) none of the above discussion should be taken to mean that, on occasions, a narrator is not, or cannot, be overtly present in films: the voice-over openings of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *American Beauty* (1999) could be cited as examples of such narrators. Nevertheless, these narrators are still part of the film and are not responsible for producing the film themselves.³¹

In conclusion, the implication of Bordwell's model of narration is that in film there is a greater relative emphasis on the implied reader/real reader end of the narrative spectrum, or what might be called the implied or real spectator/viewer. In this construction the focus is on how viewers build the story in their own minds on the basis of the various cues that a film offers; and it is to this subject that the survey moves next.

Order, Duration and Frequency

In relation to the way that events are presented on film, Bordwell points out that the:

syuzhet can cue us to construct fabula events in any sequence (a matter of order). The syuzhet can suggest fabula events as occurring in virtually any time span (duration). And the syuzhet can signal fabula events as taking place any number of times (frequency).³²

³⁰ Chatman, p. 130.

³¹ Bordwell, p. 61.

³² Ibid. p. 51.

The argument is that the fabula (events linked chronologically by cause and effect) can be rearranged in the syuzhet in any way, interspersing the ‘present’ with events from the past or the future. Genette describes these rearrangements of the syuzhet as anachronies, or leaps forwards and backwards in time. One type of anachrony is prolepsis, which he describes as ‘any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later’; in film terminology this equates to the flash-forward. The opposite effect is achieved by analepsis, which is ‘any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment’;³³ again, to use film terminology, this equates to the flashback. In addition, there are three other ways in which anachronies are joined to the story in the present; these categories are ‘external, internal or mixed’. External anachronies occur *before* the syuzhet time begins; internal anachronies happen *after* the syuzhet has commenced (filling a gap left in another part of the syuzhet); and mixed anachronies begin prior to the beginning of the syuzhet but overlap with the beginning.³⁴

These distinctions in order are relevant to the discussion of Shakespeare on film because, whilst it is rare to see an entire scene in a Shakespeare play positioned out of chronological order, there are other limited uses of anachrony within scenes that offer challenges to the filmmaker. One example is from *Hamlet* 1.1 where Horatio describes events in ancient Rome at the time Julius Caesar was murdered. It is certainly an example of external analepsis because it happens before the syuzhet begins. However, it also occurs outside of the diegesis (having happened in a different place and century) and might therefore

³³ Genette, p. 40.

³⁴ Chatman, p. 65.

also be described as hypodiegetic. However, the event in *Hamlet* 1.1 functions, at one level, to inform the spectator because it cites the murder of a head of state (which was the fate of Old Hamlet in the immediate past and the fate that awaits Claudius in the future).³⁵ It is also linked with similar climatic perturbations occurring both in the Ancient Rome of the past and the storyworld present in Denmark – e.g. the ‘dews of blood’. This raises issues such as the dramatic function of such anachronies on the early modern stage and whether it can, or should, be adapted in any way for film.

Another element of order is the physical placement of the information required to understand the world of the story – otherwise known as exposition. Sternberg observes that expositional information can be arranged using four different parameters. It can be *concentrated* in one place or *distributed* gradually as the narrative progresses; it can also be either placed at the beginning (*preliminary*) or inserted later (*delayed*).³⁶ This again may highlight points of difference or similarity between Shakespeare’s methods in the plays, mainstream film practice, and expositional choices in the films of the plays. For example, in *Hamlet* (1.2) preliminary and concentrated verbal exposition is required to outline the threat from Fortinbras of Norway. In contrast, Franco Zeffirelli omits this plot line in *Hamlet* (1990), thus avoiding the need for such exposition but eliminating the inter-state political friction inherent in the play. This is not to suggest that the removal of such preliminary and concentrated exposition is demanded only by film; a theatre director could also remove this subplot. However, I would argue that extensive levels of preliminary verbal exposition

³⁵ It is also possible that, at another level, this reference to Julius Caesar is a metatheatrical joke, drawing attention to an actor in *Hamlet* who had also played the part of Caesar when that play was staged in 1599.

³⁶ Chatman, p. 67.

are unusual in cinema (and certainly in mainstream films) and require the director to reduce the quantity of text used.

However, whilst exposition can be distributed or delayed in the syuzhet, the importance of initial exposition must be stressed because it guides what an audience pays attention to. In particular Sternberg draws attention to the ‘primacy effect’ which is ‘given full sway’ at the beginning of the syuzhet, with its importance stemming from the ‘proverbial tenacity and enduring influence of first impressions’. He describes an experiment to gauge the ‘relative impact or persuasive potency of the opening part of a message as opposed to that of the subsequently presented, concluding part’. The results were ‘highly significant’ because ‘the experiment happens to approximate in some respects to the generic features and perceptual conditions of narrative’. The psychologists dubbed the experiment a test of the ‘primacy versus recency effect’.³⁷ Concerned to understand these effects, researchers presented selected people with a block of information that outlined contradictory descriptions of a character in one block of text. One group was told about the character’s *extroverted* characteristics followed by the introverted; others were shown these characteristics in the opposite order. In both cases the text was continuous and not marked by paragraph breaks. The incompatibility of the traits³⁸ – gregarious followed by shy for example – was a way of determining which of the traits seemed to be most memorable. What they discovered was that the character being studied was ‘as a rule pronounced to be extrovert or introvert, friendly or standoffish,

³⁷ Sternberg, pp. 93-4.

³⁸ The concept of character traits and their relationship to story structure will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

according to the block of information that was presented first' and the 'primacy effect prevailed over the recency effect'.³⁹

Bordwell picks this idea up and describes how initial information in a narrative tends to establish 'a frame of reference to which subsequent information [is] subordinated as far as possible'. In this context, a character 'initially described as virtuous will tend to be considered so, even in the face of some contrary evidence'.⁴⁰ It is noticeable, for example, that two Shakespearean characters who are, from a moral perspective, less than admirable – King Richard III and Iago – are both introduced at the beginning of their respective plays and form a relationship with the audience via direct address; Macbeth is also described as noble, valiant and brave at the opening of *Macbeth*. One intention of this research is to explore the ways that Shakespeare's plays (and the films made from them) exploit this tendency. In addition, looking at the screenplay for Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), the choice of opening sequence is significantly different from the one eventually chosen – the original idea opens with 'Who's there?', followed by the sighting of the Ghost and then a move to the conference room where Hamlet is filming. In contrast the finished film opens with inter-titles summarising the key events in the backstory, shots of New York City and a sombre video soliloquy from Hamlet. As a result the primacy effect is very different, as will be explored further in Chapter Five.

³⁹ Sternberg, p. 94.

⁴⁰ Bordwell, p. 38.

Duration

A second important way in which information is presented in narratives is the means by which time is manipulated. Chatman lists the options as follows:⁴¹

1. Stretch: 'discourse time is longer than story time'
2. Ellipsis: 'the discourse halts, though time continues to pass in the story'
3. Summary: 'the discourse is briefer than the events depicted'
4. Pause: 'story-time stops though the discourse continues, as in descriptive passages'
5. Scene: 'story and discourse here are of relatively equal duration'⁴²

Again, it may be useful to use think about these distinctions in terms of the effects in Shakespeare's plays and the films. One example might be the potion-taking scene in *Romeo and Juliet* (4.3). In the time scheme of the play, it could be argued, time is somewhat slowed down as (in soliloquy) Juliet verbalises the way in which she weighs the benefits and risks of taking the potion. In other words the discourse time has elements of both Scene and Stretch. In the film *Romeo+Juliet* (1996) this reflective process is greatly truncated; this means the audience are not exposed to her fears of being misled by the Friar, of waking amongst rotting corpses, or her vision of Tybalt's bleeding body (which is not unlike Macbeth's vision of the dagger). In this sense the slight stretching of time here, to allow the externalisation of her thoughts, provides an insight into issues of life and death that are eschewed by a film version that remains solely in a scenic timeframe.

Another of the key methods of manipulating time is the use of ellipses,

⁴¹ Chatman, pp. 68-74.

⁴² The order in which these elements are presented differs from Chatman. They are ordered as above in this thesis to facilitate discussion of the elements in relation to stage and film.

relatively brief passages of time during which ‘we surmise that in the interval occurred a number of artistically inessential yet logically necessary events’. Chatman regards these ellipses as non-problematic because of the audience’s ‘virtually limitless’ capacity to parse the missing data using ‘knowledge it has acquired through *ordinary living* and *art experience*’ (italics added).⁴³ In other words it is possible to accept that a set of routine information is missing, especially if the audience has been exposed to the master schema of the classic Hollywood story, which regularly uses such ellipses. That ellipses are used in both plays and films is beyond doubt. In terms of Shakespeare’s plays one example should suffice: *Hamlet* (5.1) ends with the words ‘An hour of quiet shortly shall we see; / Till then, in patience our proceeding be’. Of course, far less than an hour of real time has elapsed the next time Claudius and Hamlet meet, but presumably various actions will have occurred in the interim that are not necessary for viewers to see.

The next two ways of manipulating time are summary and descriptive pause. In the former a number of events are shown in brief and often without dialogue (sometimes being repetitive events) to indicate the passage of an indeterminate period (it may be hours, days, weeks, months or years). Because film editing lends itself to this type of time manipulation, given its capacity to juxtapose shots from a variety of locations, it is in the cinema that summaries are most frequently used. In fact, it is difficult to think of an equivalent method that is widely used in Shakespeare’s plays. Likewise, the descriptive pause (where story time stops to describe something) is more often used in works of literature than film. This is not to say that a film could not (or does not) linger on a

⁴³ Chatman, pp. 29-30.

particular entity whilst story events are pushed into the background; nevertheless, in mainstream film this type of lingering on non-story imagery is rare (as mentioned earlier the techniques of narrative film are normally employed to explicate the syuzhet). However, it is arguable that certain Shakespeare soliloquies ('To be or not to be' for example) are moments where story time is arrested and what is being described is the internal state of the character. This is clearly somewhat of a grey area: the soliloquy might be categorised as a type of descriptive pause, but it also happens on stage in continuous time and simultaneously could be said to stretch time to externalise thought (see the Juliet example above). Whatever the categorisation, it is apparent that the type of time that elapses during a soliloquy is not 'scene time' in the way it might be used in film terms.

The one level where the time of the discourse and the time of the fabula are theoretically equal in both plays and film is the scene, which as Abbott points out, takes place 'in real time'.⁴⁴ I use the word theoretically here because, although it might ostensibly seem as though Shakespearean scenes and film scenes take place in real time, there are significant variations. For example, *Hamlet* (1.1) sees Horatio and two guards discuss the sighting of a ghost; they discuss what the sighting might mean and the state of Denmark; they decide to inform Hamlet. Here the scene is set in one location and in seemingly continuous time, yet syuzhet time occupies approximately ten to fifteen minutes whilst the storyworld time covers at least three and a half hours. The scene, viewed in continuous time on stage, therefore contains a huge unmarked ellipse and a descriptive pause when Horatio compares Denmark to Ancient Rome at the time

⁴⁴ Abbott, p. 121.

Caesar was murdered. Many similar occurrences of variable time schemes in Shakespeare have been analysed at length by Emrys Jones.⁴⁵ This brief example from *Hamlet* also highlights André Bazin's observation about the dangers of assuming that stage plays are like films, arguing that they have merely an 'illusory likeness'⁴⁶:

... if Racine, Shakespeare, or Molière cannot be brought to the cinema by just placing them before the camera and the microphone, it is because the handling of the action and the style of the dialogue were conceived as echoing through the architecture of the auditorium.⁴⁷

The conclusion that is drawn here is that not only were the plays designed for the theatre, but they also manipulate time in ways that are significantly different to cinema.

Frequency

The third variable, after Order and Duration, is Frequency, or the number of times an event is played out in the syuzhet. Chatman again usefully lists the options as follows:

1. Singularly – one representation of an event
2. Multiple-singularly – multiple representations of a recurring event
3. Repetitive – multiple representations of the same event
4. Iterative – one representation of a recurring event⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

⁴⁶ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, New edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1967, 2005), p. 55.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 106.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

It is not the plan to extrapolate in enormous detail upon frequency because this category is relatively straightforward and self-explanatory; in addition, this thesis is looking for types of frequency being adopted, rather than interrogating the theory of frequency. For example, films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Memento* (2000), and *Run, Lola, Run* (1998) all make use of Multiple-Singular frequency, showing the same event from various perspectives (and in very different ways). In Shakespeare plays frequency tends to be Singular in that most events are represented once. However, it is also apparent in the plays that various events and character traits are mentioned repetitively, but this aspect will be discussed under the concept of Redundancy later in this chapter.

Creating and Bridging Narrative Gaps

Given that the events in the world of the fabula are not normally precisely replicated in the same order, within the same time frame or with the same frequency in the syuzhet, there must be gaps. These gaps can be temporary or permanent. In the first case (temporary), the missing information may either be delayed and supplied later in the syuzhet; this is the normative method of syuzhet construction in mainstream film and in Shakespeare's plays – the audience needs to know something and the detail is supplied later. In the second case (the permanent gap), the information may never be supplied at all; for example, Iago's real motivations are never revealed, as expressed in his final reply to Othello (5.2):

OTHELLO

Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil

Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?

IAGO

Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:

From this time forth I never will speak word.

The point of drawing attention to these types of gaps is that they ‘shape the constructive activities of the spectator’.⁴⁹ Temporary gaps prompt the audience to wait for the information and to guess what might happen; permanent gaps invite the audience to scan backwards for information that may have been missed. The type of information that is temporarily omitted, as Fludernik points out, is varied – it may be a description of part of the environment, something pertaining to a character’s biography or consciousness, or an event. Therefore, a crucial part of syuzhet construction is how the ‘missing information’ is provided.⁵⁰

Whilst the writer supplies some of the missing information, the audience is also involved in the process because, as Ryan argues, people have a fundamental need to close any gaps that open. What’s more, the expectation is that those gaps will be filled by effects that are linked to the original causes, meaning that there must be ‘a *unified causal chain* [that] leads to *closure*’. Lastly, the story ‘must *communicate something* meaningful to the audience’ (italics added).⁵¹ Dealing with these topics in order, the first issue is to define what the term *unified causal chain* means. Although Fludernik suggests that ‘narratives are based on cause and effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events’, this does not imply that these relationships merely operate proximately.⁵² In fact, Brian Richardson identifies three ways in which causal

⁴⁹ Bordwell, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Fludernik, p. 40.

⁵¹ Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Toward a Definition of Narrative' in Herman (ed.), pp. 22-33 (p.29).

⁵² Fludernik, p. 2.

laws operate:⁵³ the first are ‘supernatural’ causes, where characters are subject to divine forces – this would include, for example, the operations of the Gods or Fate; second, there are ‘naturalistic’ causes, obeying ‘patterns of natural law and human psychology’- the sense most people are familiar with; third is where ‘an unlikely number of coincidental or chance happenings’ are the causal agents. It is arguable that all three are operant in Shakespearean drama: in *Hamlet* it is the appearance of the Ghost with his own revenge agenda that drives the action in the early part of Act 2; and in *Cymbeline* chance meetings help to link the action. There are also examples of all three types of cause in mainstream film storytelling, but it is true to say that naturalistic causes are used more often.⁵⁴

Abbott expands upon this idea of closure by pointing out that there is an irony in the sense that people look for ‘closure’ in narrative where the conflict is resolved, but that:

Narrative is marked almost everywhere by its lack of closure. Commonly called suspense, this is one of the two things that above everything else give narrative its life. The other thing is surprise.⁵⁵

In other words, closure becomes fundamental to syuzhet construction because the art is, in part, keeping people ‘in a fluctuating state of impatience, wonderment, and partial gratification’ until that point arrives.⁵⁶ Bordwell thus concludes that ‘we can characterize syuzhet processes as working to open, prolong, or close gaps in fabula events’. His formal definition of narrative in film is as follows:

⁵³ Richardson actually identifies a further category – metafictional – where ‘the events of the play can be altered by an authorial agent’ (p.150). Given that this is a rare occurrence in Shakespeare and in mainstream film, this variant is not discussed here.

⁵⁴ Brian Richardson, ‘Drama and Narrative’ in Herman (ed.), pp. 142-55 (p.50).

⁵⁵ Abbott, p. 57.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

In the fiction film, narrative is *the process whereby the film's syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channeling the spectator's construction of the fabula* (original italics).⁵⁷

What then is the specific process by which syuzhet and style cue and channel the attention of the spectator toward closing gaps and constructing the fabula?

The use of Schemata to understand narratives

The first point to make is that, as counter-intuitive as it might sound, viewers themselves construct substantial proportions of the fabula. This issue is relevant to the discussion of Shakespeare on film because it is conceivable that viewers may reconstruct the fabula in slightly different ways in plays and film.

As Jason Mittell points out: 'a film's story seems to be occurring in the diegetic world on screen, but it actually is a mental construction we create'.⁵⁸ Bordwell's approach to defining how a viewer perceives a film is based upon a Constructivist theory, namely that an 'organism constructs a perceptual judgement on the basis of nonconscious inferences'.⁵⁹ These inferences are either bottom-up or top-down processes. Bottom-up are based upon the 'perceptual input' of stimuli: for example, colour, shape, size, sound etc. Edward Branigan describes bottom-up processes operating 'by examining the data in very brief periods of time (utilizing little or no associated memory) and organizing it automatically into such features as edge, color, depth, motion, aural pitch, and so on'. This process is 'data-driven' and produces 'short-range effects'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Bordwell, pp. 54, 53.

⁵⁸ Jason Mittell, 'Film and television narrative' in Herman (ed.), pp. 156-71 (p.68).

⁵⁹ Bordwell, p. 31.

⁶⁰ Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, (Routledge, 1992), p. 37.

In contrast, other processes – and the ones of most relevance in this thesis – are top-down, where 'the organization of sensory data is primarily determined by expectation, background knowledge, problem-solving processes, and other cognitive operations'.⁶¹ Branigan adds that such top-down processes, 'are not constrained by stimulus time' and use a 'spectator's expectations and goals as principles of organization'.⁶² In this scenario a viewer identifies the relationships between things in the world based upon a series of cues: 'information in a text is sorted and measured by a schema against other kinds of knowledge base. The result is that certain information in a narrative is elaborately processed and assigned to a hierarchy in working memory according to relative importance while much else is discarded'.⁶³ In this way the story is created in the viewers' mind as they become involved in categorising information and making guesses about the future direction of the story: what Bordwell describes as 'hypothesis-testing'.⁶⁴ Clearly bottom-up and top-down processes can occur simultaneously but 'because top-down processes are active in watching a film, a spectator's cognitive activity is not restricted to the particular moment being viewed in a film'.⁶⁵ Bordwell then usefully categorises the schemata into sub-groups: *prototypes*, *templates* and *procedural*.

Prototype schemata

Prototype schemata are useful in identifying such things as 'individual agents, actions, goals and locales'. An example would be the gangsters Bonnie and

⁶¹ Bordwell, p. 31.

⁶² Branigan, p. 37.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 15.

⁶⁴ Bordwell, p. 31.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 37.

Clyde, where the prototype schemata used to understand the story might include ‘lovers, bank robbery and small southern town’.⁶⁶ These prototype schemata set up certain expectations and have to be learned from experience. This suggests that an eight-year-old (by way of an extreme example) would not necessarily be able to apply certain schemata.

Template schemata

The prototype schemata then fall into a larger and more useful category – *template schemata*. This category allows people to ‘add information when it is absent and test for a proper classification of data’. This ability to add information is crucial when analysing the arrangement of the syuzhet, where information will almost inevitably be missing at certain times. One of the template schemata that Bordwell refers to is the master schema, which is ‘a framework for understanding, recalling, and summarizing a particular narrative’. Under this master schema ‘the perceiver *expects each event to be discriminable and to occur in an identifiable locale*. The string of events should reveal chronological order and linear causality’ (italics added). Bordwell also notes that cause and effect relationships in template schemata should not only be sequential but consequential because when they are only sequential ‘people tend to invert the order of events more frequently’.⁶⁷

This aspect of memory is a crucial dimension of the fabula building process: it is clearly necessary to be able to remember the events in order to reconstruct the fabula. As a result, the idea of consequential connections is important in the context of the argument that this thesis makes: if people coming

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 34.

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 34-5.

to Shakespeare via film are to be able to reconstruct the *fabula* from the *syuzhet* (in a way that is useful when discussing the plays), then paying attention to the presence (or lack) of consequential cause and effect relationships in the *syuzhet* will be important.

One of the upshots of the idea of template schemata is that they require viewers to be active in filling in the missing information; to do this they must constantly review the objects of perception against these schemata, which explains why:

perception is often a skilled, learned activity; as one constructs a wider repertoire of schemata, tests them against varying situations, and has them challenged by incoming data, one's perceptual and conceptual abilities become more supple and nuanced.⁶⁸

Bordwell makes a point of drawing these distinctions because prototype and template schemata play a critical role in the process of *fabula* comprehension. He argues that 'in watching a representational film, we draw on schemata derived from our transactions with the everyday world, with other artworks, and with other films. On the basis of these schemata, we make assumptions, erect expectations, and confirm hypotheses'.⁶⁹ In addition, he argues that a given film:

offers structures of information – a narrative system and a stylistic system.

The narrative film is so made as to encourage the spectator to execute story-constructing activities. The film presents cues, patterns, and gaps that shape the viewer's application of schemata and the testing of hypotheses.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 32.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 33.

If it is the case that people apply a set of schemata to the issue of story comprehension then Bordwell argues that it follows that ‘people tacitly assume that a story is composed of discriminable events performed by certain agents and linked by particular principles. One of these principles is the idea that, between the showing of these discriminable events some information will be missing: this is an obvious point but from a theoretical perspective it is worth highlighting because when ‘information is missing, perceivers infer it or make guesses at it’. He goes on to say that ‘When events are arranged out of temporal order, perceivers try to put those events in sequence. And people seek causal connections among events, both in anticipation and in retrospect’. The viewer looks for ‘unity’ and tests each event ‘for its pertinence to the action’. It is in this context that understanding a story becomes the ability ‘to grasp what happens and where, when, and why it happens. Thus any schemata for events, locations, time, and cause/effect may become pertinent to making sense of a narrative film’.⁷¹

What, then, is the most common template structure that can be used as a master schema to understand and discuss Shakespeare’s stories on stage and on film? According to Bordwell a key master schema is the ‘canonical story format’, which comprises: ‘setting plus characters – goal – attempts – outcome – resolution’. The classical Hollywood model of storytelling embraces these core elements with considerable emphasis on goal orientation. Again, in relation to memory and comprehension, research shows these were best served when ‘the story conformed to the drive-to-goal orientation’.⁷² The implication here is that if a goal is unclear, or stated later in the story, both story comprehension and

⁷¹ Ibid. pp. 33-4.

⁷² Ibid. p. 35.

memory will be poorer. Branigan also notes that nearly all researchers agree that a narrative schema has the following format:

1. introduction of setting and characters
2. explanation of a state of affairs
3. initiating event
4. emotional response or statement of a goal by the protagonist
5. complicating actions
6. outcome
7. reactions to the outcome⁷³

This list might suggest that such a schema might be formulaic, but in fact Branigan suggests that presenting the information imaginatively is the key to getting viewers to remember. On the one hand familiarity with the master schema is a boon because ‘perceivers tend to remember a story in terms of *categories of information stated as propositions, interpretations, and summaries* rather than remembering the way the story is actually presented or its surface features’. However, the downside of familiarity is that ‘the more typical the information is for a perceiver, the less well it is recalled for it is already implicit in a guiding schema’.⁷⁴ In other words familiar schemata not only accommodate the unusual but also have a need for them; this is what one might call offering people what they expect in a story, but not in the way they expect it. This line of enquiry may prove illuminating in relation to Shakespeare: do his characters have clear goals and are these goals sustained throughout the story? If not, do they change and how do filmmakers address the issue?

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid. pp. 14-5.

Procedural schemata

There is then one further group of schemata that is relevant and that is *procedural*: these schemata are the ‘operational protocols which dynamically acquire and organize information’. In contrast to prototype and templates, material on screen is classified by spectators according to four distinct types of motivation:

1. First is *compositional* motivation: is it relevant to the story?
2. Second is *realistic* motivation: it is plausible that a character would do this in a real-world situation?
3. The third is *transtextual* motivation: in a particular genre (e.g. a thriller) an audience might reasonably expect to see a chase, or in a western a gunfight – even if these events are not ‘realistically introduced nor causally necessary’.
4. Fourth is what is called *artistic* motivation: it is present for its own sake, without explanation – or need for explanation.⁷⁵

In practice ‘most films ask the spectator to employ compositional and transtextual motivation’ with realistic motivation applied only when the action taken seems implausible. Artistic motivation then tends to be used (in the context of the classical story model) when other types of motivation are not apparent.⁷⁶

In reconstructing a story a viewer will also tend to use *assumptions* that a particular pattern will be continued (for example, that characters will persist in time and space even when they are not on screen), make *inferences* about why a character has reacted in a particular way (crying normally has a cause), use their

⁷⁵ Bordwell, p. 36.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

memory to try and recall and order story elements, and *hypothesize* about what might happen (or has happened) – generating suspense and curiosity.⁷⁷

The use of schemata does raise a couple of issues in relation to Shakespeare and film. Taking *Hamlet* again as an example, on stage there is mention of ‘the morn in russet mantle clad’, which at a very basic level announces the sunrise; but in addition this passage has a metaphorical role suggesting that the sun (which an audience can also read as representing the King) is reliable and sustains life through its presence. In addition, the idea of a russet mantle implies a peasant farmer who cares for the land. This raises two issues. The first is that, on film, no number of sunrises, however, beautifully shot, could lead people to make those connections. As a result, film ‘lacks the ambiguity and temporal play often employed in literary narrative’.⁷⁸ This lack of ambiguity echoes the issue raised earlier about an abundance of detail on film versus the specificity of textual and verbal narratives. Second, the Shakespeare text only offers further information if the audience is aware of the sun as a metaphor for the King and a mantle as a rustic cloak worn by peasants.

A further issue to consider is the degree to which the audience has access to the internal workings of the minds of the characters in film and stage narratives. Although audiences see expressions and gestures and pauses, and listen to dialogue, ultimately they are obliged to ‘apprehend human interiors by inference’.⁷⁹ This restricted access means the viewer needs to do a greater amount of speculative work to assemble possible motivations and make inferences about what might or might not happen in the future – or to guess what

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 37.

⁷⁸ Jason Mittell, 'Film and television narrative' in Herman (ed.), pp. 157-71 (p.62).

⁷⁹ Abbott, p. 118.

has happened in the past. Fludernik expresses this as film ‘cannot represent thought’, although she does note that in film ‘visual impressions and the facial expressions *indicative of thought and emotion* certainly play a significant role’ (italics added). Nevertheless, the spectator of a play or a film is always, to some degree, mind-reading.⁸⁰

It might be argued here that Shakespearean soliloquies do offer an insight into the human mind but, as Abbott points out, ‘they rarely match the kind of extensive explorations in depth that can be rendered in verbal narratives via *indirect discourse* (thought report) or *interior monologue*’.⁸¹ In other words, on the early modern stage there is a greater degree of access to the mind via verbal description, but on film there is going to be an imprecise correlation between what a character *is* thinking and what audiences *think* he or she is thinking. That is part of the joy of the medium and the way in which film narration is constructed will partly cue audiences to speculate about what has happened to the characters in the past and what might happen to them in the future. All of which raises the issue of how viewers are cued and how hypotheses are confirmed, denied or delayed.

Suspense, Curiosity and Surprise

Three important emotional reactions created by the opening and closing of gaps, and the confirming or denying of hypotheses, are suspense, curiosity and surprise. Bridgeman quotes Sternberg’s view that the fabula-syuzhet relationship should be considered ‘in terms of the universals of suspense, curiosity, and surprise,

⁸⁰ Fludernik, p. 102.

⁸¹ Abbott, p. 118.

which are generated by the gaps between story time and discourse time'.⁸² Bordwell also writes that the 'syuzhet aims not to let us construct the fabula in some logically pristine state but rather to guide us to construct the fabula in a specific way, by *arousing in us particular expectations at this or that point, eliciting our curiosity or suspense, and pulling surprises along the way*' (italics added).⁸³

In general, these three elements work in very different ways: suspense tends to generate hypotheses about the future (prompting questions such as what will happen next or how will they escape from this situation?); curiosity works to generate hypotheses about the past (prompting questions about why the characters are in a particular position or why they are behaving in a particular way); surprise, on the other hand, is generated by an event that could not have been expected (or predicted) by the spectators. In qualitative terms, Chatman's view is that suspense is more valuable than surprise because a suspenseful film can be re-watched for the 'pain and pleasure' of the experience: 'we know what is going to happen, but we cannot communicate that information to the characters'.⁸⁴ Surprise is less valuable because it is definitively *not* a surprise if, on second viewing, a spectator knows what is going to happen.

Suspense – the delay in offering answers to hypotheses about the fate of a character – is, it might reasonably be argued, a core element of both film and Shakespearean stories (to a greater or lesser degree). However, in the case of Curiosity – information about the past – Shakespearean plays tend to offer very little detailed background about the characters. This is because there is, I would

⁸² Teresa Bridgeman, 'Time and space' in Herman (ed.), pp. 52-65 (p.54).

⁸³ Bordwell, p. 52.

⁸⁴ Chatman, p. 59.

argue, what might be called *contextual subtext* embedded in their construction. For example, audiences of the early modern period might reasonably be expected to possess certain key contextual knowledge to interpret particular beliefs or actions: a belief in a Christian God; an understanding of the central role of the church in social life; a knowledge of some of the key differences between Catholicism and Protestantism; a sense of where one stood in the social hierarchy and what that implied for behaviour; the role of the King and his right to act in a particular way; the relative position and rights of men and women – to name just a few. I refer to this as *contextual subtext* on the grounds that the writer might reasonably assume that the original audience knew such information; for a modern viewer, it may be necessary to make this contextual subtext more explicit in order to make greater sense of the story, or to illustrate why certain characters feel limited in their actions. Hamlet's refusal to kill the praying Claudius in the Chapel is just one such event. If belief in God and the power of prayer is disregarded, then Hamlet's reluctance becomes more difficult to understand.

That point aside, an aspect of suspense and curiosity is how they are used in the opening scenes of films to direct the attention of the viewer: for example, the opening of *The Big Chill* (1983) provokes mainly curiosity: who are these people, why are they sad, who is the dead man, how do they know him? In *The Usual Suspects* (1995) the focus also begins with curiosity: there has been a shoot-out and a robbery; who are the people being assembled at the opening of the film; who did the robbery and why? In contrast, the opening of *Erin Brockovich* (2000) is more focused on the future: the preliminary, concentrated exposition highlights that she is poor, she married young, got divorced, is left with dependent children, and is desperate for a job. The focus is on suspense:

how will she solve those problems? Likewise, in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) the focus is on the future: will the play get written, will Henslowe escape retribution and will Shakespeare find his Muse? Thus suspense and curiosity are all used to prompt the viewer to begin the process of hypothesis creation and gap-filling: a process that continues with a mix of these techniques throughout the syuzhet. In light of the above, one aim of this thesis is to determine how films of Shakespeare's stories begin compared to the plays. *Hamlet*, for example, focuses on curiosity – who are these people, why is Denmark on a war footing, why is the ghost walking and why does Hamlet dislike his step-father? Does *Hamlet* (1990) or *Hamlet* (2000) prompt the same questions or something different? If there are different questions are they of any lasting relevance to the interpretation to the story?

Retardation and Redundancy

There are two final principles that affect syuzhet construction: retardation and redundancy. The first of these, retardation, is a fundamental quality of all narrative discourse because it involves a delay in supplying information that helps to generate the conditions for suspense, curiosity and surprise. Sternberg describes narrative as 'a dynamic system of competing and mutually blocking retardatory patterns. Low-level hypotheses are often confirmed very quickly, but where 'macrostructurally significant narrative action is at stake, the information is typically withheld for some time'.⁸⁵ Whilst 'retardation' is 'one of the great pleasures of narrative', there is a difference in the 'quality and degree of retardation' that any given media can tolerate; in mainstream cinema that

⁸⁵ Sternberg, p. 38.

tolerance is ‘much more restricted’ according to Abbott.⁸⁶ In other words, whereas information can be withheld for an entire season in a TV series, in mainstream cinema the questions raised need to be answered more quickly to sustain interest. Another aim of this thesis is to establish the degree to which Shakespearean stories tend to withhold information and whether the films of the plays alter this balance.

In contrast to the withholding of information there is also a need to repeat certain key pieces of information. This is a process called redundancy and its purpose is to ensure that viewers build their hypotheses on specific cues and is designed to ‘reinforce assumptions, inferences, and hypotheses about story information’.⁸⁷ There are three basic levels of redundancy. The first is at the level of the fabula where ‘any given event, character, quality, story function, environment, or character commentary may be redundant with respect to any other’.⁸⁸ For example, someone might be described as a drunk, have a friend question the amount s/he is drinking, s/he may be seen drinking alone in a bar, or lying comatose in a living room with beer bottles on a table. The second is at the level of the syuzhet, where the narration can achieve redundancy by reiterating its relations to the perceiver [the viewer/spectator] by repeating its own commentary about an event or character or by adhering to a consistent point of view. The third level of redundancy is at ‘the level of the relations between syuzhet and fabula [where] redundancy can be achieved by representing an event more than once [...] or by making any fabula event, character quality, story function, environment, or character commentary redundant with respect to

⁸⁶ Abbott, p. 116.

⁸⁷ Bordwell, p. 56.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

narrational commentary'.⁸⁹ Bordwell quotes scenarist Frances Marion's opinion that it is important to 'state every important fact three times' because 'the play is lost if the audience fails to understand the premises on which it is based'.⁹⁰

Redundancy as a technique is important because there will almost certainly be different types of redundancy in operation in Shakespeare's dramatic texts compared to the films. For example, Shakespeare makes use of verbal redundancy to associate Claudius with drinking alcohol, in phrases such as 'This heavy-headed revel east and west' (1.4.17), 'No jocund health that Denmark drinks today' (1.2.125), 'We'll teach you to drink deep' (1.2.176), 'The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath' (5.2.185) and 'Stay, give me drink' (5.2.196) to name a few. Comparing the film versions, Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* shows Claudius feasting and drinking to reinforce the idea of 'revels' whilst, in contrast, Almereyda's *Hamlet* doesn't focus as much on Claudius's drunkenness but shows more of his physical intimacy with Gertrude.

Characters

Having dealt with the structural elements that affect the process of building the syuzhet, the next variable to consider is character. Fludernik argues that 'narrative is the communication of anthropocentric experience'.⁹¹ This view is endorsed by David Herman, albeit in different words, writing that 'stories are accounts of what happened to particular people'.⁹² Ryan also argues that a narrative 'must create a world and populate it with characters and objects' but adds that this world must 'undergo changes of state that are caused by non-

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 57.

⁹⁰ Frances Marion quoted in ibid. p. 164.

⁹¹ Fludernik, p. 59.

⁹² David Herman, 'Introduction' in Herman (ed.), pp. 3-21 (p.3).

habitual physical events'. The question is do these characters simply have functions within a narrative or are they valuable in and of themselves?

Chatman suggests that the Russian Formalists certainly saw character as 'functional' rather than 'psychological essences' – they have a plot function and can be analysed by what they 'do' as well as what they 'are'.⁹³ Yet he also makes the important point that 'we appreciate character traits for their own sake, including some that have little or nothing to do with "what happens"'. In other words, not all characters can be 'reduced to any single aspect or pattern'.⁹⁴ Henry James chooses to link character with action, arguing that 'character and action are inseparable' and uses what has become a well-known formulation: 'what is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' Abbott emphasises this linking of character and action, writing that 'what gave action its importance for James is the revelation of character'.⁹⁵ Here actions speak more powerfully about the real character of a person than any number of words – as expressed in the dictum: 'by their actions do we know them'.⁹⁶ This idea has proven to have lasting power and can be seen in the way the Hollywood model tends to prefer actions to words as a way of revealing character.

Fludernik then outlines the aspect of characters with a goal-orientation, writing that:

A narrative is a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several *protagonists* of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal

⁹³ Chatman, p. 111.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 112.

⁹⁵ Henry James quoted in Abbott, p. 131.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

or spatial sense and who (mostly) perform *goal-directed actions* (action and plot structure) (italics added).⁹⁷

There are two ideas here that need further exploration: *goal-directed actions* and *protagonists*. There is an oft-repeated piece of advice in the screenwriting manuals that the classical Hollywood model requires active protagonists who pursue goals that tend to be concrete versus abstract because the former aid narrative clarity – the viewer can clearly see when the goal has been reached.⁹⁸ In looking at the films and the plays this thesis sets out to determine whether the characters in the plays have the same types of goals that tend to be used in the classical Hollywood model. In addition, it examines whether these goals change in nature during the telling of the stories in both plays and films. Secondly, the word protagonist presupposes that someone will oppose his or her goal. Based on the Ancient Greek word for conflict, *agon*, the terms protagonist (hero) and antagonist (hero's chief opponent) make conflict central to 'any narrative of interest'. What's more, this conflict is often one 'in which power is at stake'.⁹⁹

In summary, it is clear that whilst characters will have functions within a *syuzhet*, which in turn is organised for a specific effect, this does not preclude the presence of character traits that are there 'for their own sake'. In fact what gives the modern character appeal to an audience is not homogeneity but 'heterogeneity or even scatter in his personality'. Chatman goes on to say that whilst 'character and event are logically necessary to narrative [...] the

⁹⁷ Fludernik, p. 6.

⁹⁸ The screenwriting manuals referenced here are a series of commercial publications that describe some of the core elements that are said to be essential in the mainstream film.

⁹⁹ Abbott, p. 55.

contemplation of character is the predominate pleasure in modern art narrative'.¹⁰⁰

This discussion of characters with a psychological aspect brings up the issue of how to determine character traits and how such traits might be conveyed on stage and on film. One way of thinking about a trait is that is a generalised approach to life. Chatman writes that this is 'the characterization of trait as a great system of interdependent habits'. He goes on to say that 'narratives may not examine habits microscopically, but they do demand of the audience the capacity to recognize certain habits as symptomatic of a trait' (i.e. constantly washing hands might equate to compulsive).¹⁰¹ In addition, a trait on-screen needs to have 'relative persistence' – it cannot just be a single action. In this sense the reinforcement of traits has something in common with the concept of redundancy (discussed above).

Chatman then makes a link between the number of traits and two main types of character – flat and round. A 'flat' character is 'endowed with a single trait – or very few' and their behavior is 'predictable'. 'Round' characters, in contrast:

possess a variety of traits, some of them conflicting or even contradictory; their behavior is not predictable – they are capable of changing, of surprising us, and so on.

In fact, the idea of a character having 'conflicting traits is absolutely vital to modern character theory' according to Chatman.¹⁰² Given that a function of classical narrative structure is to cue viewers to create hypotheses about the

¹⁰⁰ Chatman, pp. 111-13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 122.

¹⁰² Ibid. pp. 122-3.

future and the past, the presence of round and unpredictable characters would seem important for the generation of suspense and curiosity – if they are unpredictable then it makes it more interesting to try and guess what actions they might take. However, given the relative lack of access to their minds, as discussed earlier, this also reinforces the need to visualise not only their goal-oriented actions but also their traits and habits.

Chatman also draws our attention to the difference between events and traits. He argues that events ‘have strictly determined positions in story (at least in classical narratives)’. Even if put in a different order in the discourse they can be reconstructed in the ‘natural order’. In contrast traits are ‘not subject to these limitations’ and ‘may prevail throughout the work and beyond’. He goes on to say that ‘traits [...] extend over the time spans staked out by the events’.¹⁰³ Clearly, however, a trait becomes more significant where it intersects with events. Hamlet’s hesitancy is fundamental to the working of the plot – were he to be headstrong (like Harry Percy in *Henry IV Part 1*) then *Hamlet* would be a different play – probably with a much-reduced running time. It is also arguable that Hamlet’s traits of hesitancy and over-thinking are aspects of the play that are perhaps more memorable than the plot itself. In other words, character traits are critical to the interpretation of the play. One productive area for research is thus what a particular character is seen to do – both event and non-event related – in a film. Do they mainly talk or do they have particular habits that reveal traits? For example, Hamlet makes a point of telling Horatio that saying that he has been in ‘continual practice’ prior to the fencing match (5.2.134): is Hamlet ever seen practicing his fencing in any of the films?

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 128, 23.

In summary, the type of characters that appear in classical Hollywood films tend to be:

psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and behaviors.¹⁰⁴

It will, therefore, be of importance to gauge to what degree a Shakespearean character does, or does not, align with these characteristics.

Dialogue

As a result of the relative weight given to actions rather than words, the film medium gives rather less emphasis to dialogue than the page or the stage; in fact Fludernik highlights the fundamental disparity between language as the ‘medium for narrative texts’ and film where ‘language is not in fact the dominant medium of representation’.¹⁰⁵ In addition, modern film dialogue is a stylised version of normal speech – often stripped of the disconnected, slightly incoherent reality of non-scripted conversation. For the purpose of this thesis, however, the important distinction to be drawn is between film dialogue and Shakespeare’s use of language.

¹⁰⁴ Bordwell, p. 157.

¹⁰⁵ Fludernik, p. 64.

As many people have noted, good film dialogue gives the appearance of being real and is characterised by relatively short exchanges – the characters do not talk for extended periods (normally). In contrast, Shakespeare’s language is often marked out by its poetic rhythm, longer exchanges of dialogue, non-conversational word order and the fact that it is often descriptive. For example, there are characters who, from time to time, act as narrators and describers: Enobarbus’s speech in *Antony and Cleopatra* is one such passage: ‘The barge she sat in like a burnish’d throne / Burned on the water’. To ‘appreciate it in the theatre’ suggests Abbott, ‘we must to some degree detach ourselves from what we see before us on stage (Enobarbus and Agrippa in a house in Rome)’ and imagine the scene he describes mentally.¹⁰⁶ When this speech is used in a film the task of detachment and the use of the imagination is made more difficult by the plenitude of visual data on screen – our attention may wander if our eyes stray to background visual information (as noted earlier) or the visualisation of a barge will almost certainly fall short of our mental image of a ‘burnish’d throne’. Shakespeare’s dialogue here – as with ‘the morn in russet mantle clad’ example – is again connotative rather than merely denotative. These are some of the reasons that, as Fludernik points out, in film ‘there is no place for the written word, and even conversational narrative becomes boring if it is overused’.¹⁰⁷

One final observation about classical film dialogue is that gaps tend to exist ‘between what people say and what they mean’.¹⁰⁸ This phenomenon is designed to convey the idea that the subtext – what is not said – is the most important factor. It is not intended to expand into a further exploration of subtext

¹⁰⁶ Abbott, p. 119.

¹⁰⁷ Fludernik, p. 114.

¹⁰⁸ Bronwen Thomas, ‘Dialogue’ in Herman (ed.), pp. 80-93 (p.83).

here, although Linda Seger has produced a thorough account of its various uses.¹⁰⁹ The object here is merely to note that the idea of subtext further amplifies the importance of actions in film (as noted earlier) and that this aspect will be an expected part of the classic master schema.

These factors raise a number of issues that are explored in this thesis. First, how long are speeches in Shakespeare's plays versus the norm in mainstream films? If dialogue is cut in the film adaptations, where in the syuzhet do the main cuts fall – are they consistent throughout or concentrated in particular areas? What type of material gets cut – exchanges between flat characters or descriptive passages? Have particular filmmakers adapted their scripts in a way that brings them closer to the structure of the classical Hollywood model? The answers to such questions will provide insight into the areas where the structure of the syuzhet is most altered and how the cuts affect the reconstruction of the fabula.

Comparing Shakespearean and Hollywood macro-structural models

The fabula (the events of the story reconstructed by the viewer in chronological order) is influenced by the particular choice of events and their order (syuzhet), along with the use of medium-specific techniques (style). This situation raises a further question: if a story can be rendered in different ways in different media, is it the same story? One way is to try and identify events that are essential to the story and those that are expendable. Identifying major events can be achieved by focusing on 'critical junctures [where] we are tuned to expect particular

¹⁰⁹ Linda Seger, *Writing subtext : what lies beneath*, (Studio City, Calif.: Michael Wiese ; Enfield : Publishers Group UK [distributor], 2011).

events’.¹¹⁰ At such points spectators’ hypotheses tend to generate questions such as what will the character do next or even larger questions such as what does this story mean?

Narrative theorists distinguish major structural moments from those that are less vital to the plot by placing them in a logical hierarchy. As Chatman points out:

Some [events] are more important than others. In the classical narrative, only major events are part of the chain or armature of contingency.¹¹¹

Chatman names these major events *kernels* (based on Barthes’ term *noyau*), whilst Abbott calls them *constituent events*. They ‘advanc[e] the plot by raising and satisfying questions’ and they are moments where the action takes a turn in a significant new direction. They are ‘nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths’. He goes on to say that ‘kernels cannot be deleted without destroying the narrative logic’.¹¹²

In contrast Chatman names minor plot events *satellites* (Abbott’s term is *supplementary events*), and argues that these are less crucial and can be deleted ‘without disturbing the logic of the plot’. This is not to suggest that satellites are irrelevant – their omission may well impoverish the narrative aesthetically – but they are moments *where no choices are required* and are ‘solely the workings out of the choices made at the kernels’ (*italics added*).¹¹³ Unfortunately, the process of identification and classification is rather easier in theory than in practice and ‘choosing which events fall into which categories can be a vexed

¹¹⁰ Bordwell, p. 37.

¹¹¹ Chatman, p. 53.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 54.

enterprise'.¹¹⁴ For example, is the choice to confront the threat of Fortinbras in *Hamlet* a kernel or a satellite? Zeffirelli thought the latter, one presumes, because he cut the entire subplot from the story; it is arguable that another director may regard the decision to react against the threat to Denmark as a kernel (as Almereyda did).

Nevertheless, what is apparent is that kernels, or constituent events, are moments that require choices to be made: these moments are described in modern screenwriting manuals as Turning Points. In classical film narration there will, ideally, be moments of choice in every scene, but the major choices but will spin the action in a new direction. These turning points are noted here because they will form the backbone of the narrative structure that will be compared later in the thesis.

Given that there are a number of kernels (or turning points) that form the armature of a syuzhet, the next variable to highlight is the contrast between the macro-structure of Shakespeare's plays and the classical Hollywood model. As Bordwell notes, the mainstream model is predicated on ease of comprehension: 'we intuitively recognize an ordinary, easily comprehensible movie when we see it'.¹¹⁵ Clearly the most straightforward manner of organising the syuzhet is in chronological order – meaning that the spectator is mainly concerned to fill the temporal and spatial gaps between events and building hypotheses. If the narrative is presented out of chronological order the viewers must expend more mental energy and capacity reordering those events, which risks them losing track of what is happening in real time. This, as Bordwell points out, is probably

¹¹⁴ H. Porter Abbott, 'Story, plot, and narration' in Herman (ed.), pp. 39-51 (p.41).

¹¹⁵ Bordwell, p. 156.

why ‘most films avoid temporal reshuffling’.¹¹⁶ As a result, classical Hollywood narration typically encourages the spectator to construct coherent, consistent time and space and ‘favors a style which strives for utmost clarity from moment to moment’.¹¹⁷ Abbott reinforces this point, writing that films have a ‘need to make the story line move with greater clarity and simplicity’ because they are being followed in continuous time (the showing time of the film).¹¹⁸

This is not to say that prolepses and analepses cannot or do not happen in mainstream cinema, but that they tend to happen in more easily comprehensible ways. In *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) for example, the narrator lets the viewer know at the beginning of the story that he is already dead; thus it can quickly be deduced that the narrative is told in flashback. Another method is the use of multiple flashbacks, as seen in *Citizen Kane* (1941). However, clarity is achieved in the storytelling by ensuring that the various flashback events are then recounted in strictly chronological order – from Kane’s childhood through to old age. It should also be made clear here that this does not mean that a particular art-film syuzhet is forbidden from re-ordering events, but to stress that stories that run in consequential order will almost certainly be somewhat easier to comprehend than those out of order.

The presence of goals and the pursuit of goals in classical film narration are also supported in the macro-structure by the presence of deadlines. These require the spectator, argues Bordwell, to ‘construct forward-aiming, all or nothing causal hypotheses: either the protagonist will achieve the goal in time or he will not’. He goes on to say that ‘future-oriented “suspense” hypotheses’ are

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 33.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 163.

¹¹⁸ Abbott, p. 116.

more important than ‘past-oriented “curiosity” ones,’ and – as noted earlier – surprise is less important than either’.¹¹⁹ Within such a forward-facing model, the use of foreshadowing and redundancy are relatively more important because they heighten tension and reduce the need for surprises. This suppression of surprise in the mainstream model is necessary because too many surprises undermine the idea of hypothesis creation – what is the point of trying to guess something that one could not possibly have known? This, incidentally, is also the reason that the use of the *deus ex machina* is avoided in classical Hollywood narration: because it solves problems by surprising pseudo-magical means rather than by the character finding the solution.

Bordwell suggests that in this goal-oriented macro-structure the most clearly delineated character tends to be the protagonist, who ‘becomes the principal causal agent, the target of any narrative restriction, and the chief object of audience identification’. This tends to lead to a structured series of four main plot stages: ‘an undisturbed stage, the disturbance, the struggle, and the elimination of the disturbance’. The pattern holds good for the ‘well-made play, the popular romance, and, [...] the later-nineteenth century short story. The characters’ causal interactions are thus to a great extent functions of such overarching syuzhet/fabula patterns’. One upshot of this, argues Bordwell, is that innovations in syuzhet and style are not encouraged and the ‘principal innovations occur at the level of the fabula – i.e. “new stories”’.¹²⁰

This lack of innovation in the syuzhet accounts to some degree for the tendency of mainstream film to follow broad structural guidelines that suggest

¹¹⁹ Bordwell, pp. 164-5.

¹²⁰ Ibid. pp. 157, 64.

that there should be four to five major turning points (or kernels).¹²¹ In a 90-minute film these occur (roughly) every 15 minutes at 10/30/45/60/75 with a climax at 85 minutes and a 5-minute epilogue; in the 120-minute film the turning points tend to occur every 20 minutes at 10/30/60/90 with a climax at 115 and a 5-minute epilogue. These models are fully explained in the screenwriting manuals but the main point to take away is that this structure makes allowance for the fact that storytelling is, in part, about leading and then regularly reversing viewer expectations. In addition, Bordwell notes that:

usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere – work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships. Each line will possess a goal, obstacles and a climax.¹²²

Hollywood narration also ‘clearly demarcates its scenes by neoclassical criteria – unity of time (continuous or consistently intermittent), space (a definable locale), and action (a distinct cause-effect phase).¹²³

The scene, the ‘building block of classical Hollywood dramaturgy – is more intricately constructed. Each scene displays distinct phases. First comes the exposition, which specifies the time, place and relevant characters – their spatial positions and their current states of mind (usually as a result of previous scenes). In the middle of the scene, characters act towards their goals: they struggle, make choices, make appointments, set deadlines, and plan future events. In the course

¹²¹ These broad structural guidelines are outlined in various screenwriting manuals, including those written by Linda Aronson, Syd Field, Josh Golding, Michael Hauge, Karl Iglesias, Dara Marks, Robert McKee, Linda Seger, John Truby, John Yorke, Blake Snyder, Christopher Vogler and Stuart Voytilla,

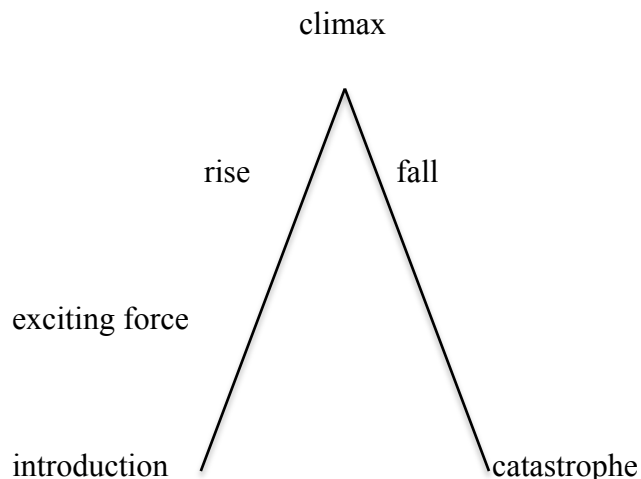
¹²² Bordwell, pp. 157-8.

¹²³ Ibid. p. 158.

of this, the classical scene continues or closes off cause-effect developments left dangling in prior scenes while also opening up new causal lines for future development. At least one line of action must be left suspended, in order to motivate the shifts to the next scene, which picks up the suspended line (often via a “dialogue hook”).¹²⁴ The ending is then ‘the crowning of the structure, the logical conclusion of the string of events, the final effect of the initial cause, the revelation of the truth’.¹²⁵

Clearly the position of key story moments in classical Hollywood narration may be positioned differently to those in Shakespeare’s plays. One model that has been influential when discussing the position of events in Shakespearean tragedy (for example) is Freytag’s Pyramid (see below). There are problems with this model, particularly in regard to the conflation of the Introduction with exposition (as discussed by Sternberg in his book *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* cf. pp.5-8 and mentioned earlier in this thesis). However, one feature to highlight is the fact that the climax is in the middle of the play, where the initial goal of the main character has been achieved.

FREYTAG’S PYRAMID



¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 159.

A few examples might suffice here: Brutus and Cassius kill Caesar in 3.1; Macbeth wants to become king and he achieves this in 3.1; Romeo wants to marry and he is first seen as a married man in 3.1; Iago wants Michael Cassio's position in the military and by the end of 2.3 Cassio is disgraced (this example may be controversial but the assertion is based upon the fact that Iago is the one who drives the action); Hamlet sets out to prove his uncle's guilt and does so by the end of 3.2 (again, there is a discrimination here between the goal that Hamlet initially sets himself – to prove guilt – rather than the goal he is given by the Ghost, which is revenge). In contrast, as discussed above, the classical Hollywood model works towards a climax at the end of the story – the moment of catastrophe in Freytag's model.

The catastrophe is also, of course, a form of climax – the point towards which the narrative has been travelling – Hamlet takes revenge and dies; Lear's kingdom and his family are torn apart by his actions; Macbeth is unable to hold onto his kingdom, which is the same problem that afflicts Richard III. However, the main point to be taken from this comparison is that the macro-structure of the plays may be different to the classical model and, if so, they may have an implication for the comprehension of the plays on film. These differences will be explored later in the thesis as each play is examined in more detail.

CONCLUSION

What emerges from this survey is that the spectator coming to a classical film has an intuitive understanding of the types of general rules a story will follow. On a macro-structural level there is likely to be a main plot that deals with the main issue at stake and a secondary plot that deals with a relationship involving the main character – possibly involving romance or a close same-sex friendship. The protagonist may (or may not) achieve the goal but the ending will be conclusive either way. There are likely to be four or five major turning points in the story and the plot will make extensive use of redundancy to reinforce key points, with retardation and deadlines to build suspense. Unexplained behaviours will prompt curiosity about key factors from the past affecting the behaviour of the protagonist in the present.

There is likely to be a single main protagonist whose life is disturbed by a non-habitual event; he or she will then set himself or herself a concrete goal to redress the situation. Any actions taken will come into conflict with forces of antagonism that will attempt to obstruct the protagonist. The links between scenes will be causally determined, although the effects may not be immediately proximate to the causes. The causal relationship is more likely to be consequential than merely sequential to aid memory and the order of the *syuzhet* will be largely chronological to aid reconstruction of the *fabula*; this does not preclude the use of *analepsis* and *prolepsis*, but the likelihood is that these will be arranged in such a way as to aid comprehension (e.g. flashbacks and flash-forwards will be arranged chronologically rather than in a random order).

Lastly, the viewer will use all of the available data in the film to reconstruct the *fabula* using a combination of prototype schemata (identifiable

types of persons, actions, locales, etc.), template schemata (in this case the classical story), and procedural schemata (motivations and relations of causality, time, and space).

Against this background the following chapters will now analyse three plays (*Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*,) alongside four films made from these plays (*Romeo+Juliet*, 1996; *Tempest*, 2010; *Hamlet*, 1990; *Hamlet*, 2000). Lastly, because the thesis concentrates (albeit not exclusively) on narrative changes at the fabula and syuzhet levels, selected criticism by Shakespeare film scholars is not included in this chapter but will be included at the head of the relevant chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

ROMEO + JULIET (1996)

Background

It is true to say that the popularisation of Shakespeare's plays on film in the 1990s, of which Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* (1996) was a prime example, divided opinion. Lynda Boose and Richard Burt think that the film 'went the furthest in enunciating itself as a teen film', leading to its categorisation as an 'MTV rock video' by journalists at the time.¹²⁶ Patricia Tatspaugh also observes that 'Luhrmann's film and the sound-track released with it very successfully targeted a younger audience, the MTV generation of teenagers roughly the age of *Romeo and Juliet*'.¹²⁷ Samuel Crowl agrees, arguing that the 'MTV visual style and soundtrack', combined with the casting of Leonardo di Caprio and Clare Danes, made a 'standard Shakespeare play taught in high schools [...] immediately and excitingly available to its audience'.¹²⁸

However, Boose and Burt also raise the spectre of the 'displacement of literary culture by film and video culture' and the 'invoking [of] the high literary text only to dismiss it in favor of the actor's performance'. This led to 'an increased interest in the strategies of performance accompanied by a decreased focus on the poetic and rhetorical'. They also have concerns about 'the potential diminishment that has always been raised about putting Shakespeare on film' being exacerbated by the 'whole-hearted American embraces' [of] 'the Bard'.

¹²⁶ Lynda E. Boose and Richard Burt, *Shakespeare, the Movie : Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 10.

¹²⁷ Patricia Tatspaugh in Russell Jackson, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 164.

¹²⁸ Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare At The Cineplex*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 119.

These concerns were amplified in the popular media by writers such as Janet Maslin, whose review in the *New York Times* brands the film as ‘headache Shakespeare’.¹²⁹ Crowl also notes Maslin’s distaste, adding that she had wondered where the audience would come from to see ‘a classic play thrown in the path of a subway train’.¹³⁰ The answer was emphatic: the film successfully reached its intended audience, coming in ‘first at the box office the week of its release in the United States’, namely November 1-7, 1996 when it took US\$14.5m.¹³¹ As Crowl also points out, ‘it led all the films released that weekend [...] in box-office receipts – a first for a Shakespeare film’.¹³² In fact it went on to be by far the most successful Shakespeare film of the period 1989-2010, taking US\$46m in the USA and US\$145m worldwide.¹³³

In terms of the structural changes that are made to the plays in general, when adapted for film, Russell Jackson notes that ‘the opening and closing sections of the plays seem to be most problematic’, with adapters who ‘otherwise stick to the structure of the original’ devising new strategies to deal with how the story starts and finishes. He notes in particular the compression of events from ‘around act four’ and ‘towards the end’ of the film versions of the plays. Jackson sees evidence of such changes in Luhrmann’s film and in Zeffirelli’s *Romeo and Juliet* from 1968. In the latter Romeo is not seen obtaining the poison and in both films the events around the tomb are simplified. In the Zeffirelli version ‘Paris does not appear’ and ‘there is little sense that the expedition is dangerous’;

¹²⁹ Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen : A Century of Film and Television*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 , Reprinted 2007), pp. 229-32.

¹³⁰ Samuel Crowl, *Screen Adaptations : Shakespeare's Hamlet : the relationship between text and film*, (2014), p. 120.

¹³¹ Boose and Burt, pp. 17-8.

¹³² In fact it took in excess of US\$11m in just three days (1-3 November 1996).

¹³³ <http://www.boxofficemojo.com> accessed 27 May, 2015. It also outperformed Shakespeare modernisations that were to follow in the next decade, including *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), which took US\$38.1m, and *She's The Man* (2006), which took US\$33.7m.

similarly, Paris is not present in the Luhrmann version. Rothwell also notes the way the Nurse's 'great monologue about Susan' (from 1.3.19) is cut, along with the Friar's 'tiresome fifth-act plot summary' and part of his 'craven desertion' of Juliet in the tomb/church.¹³⁴ Jackson goes on to say that 'one crude but persistent truth about making films out of these Elizabethan plays seems to reassert itself in both films: the ending needs to show, rather than promise, something to the audience'.¹³⁵ What he is driving at is the idea that a narrator figure cannot just recount in words what will happen, but that the events must be shown. Luhrmann's solution to this particular issue was to film the footage of the bodies being brought out of the church as if it were TV coverage, with the action summarised by a news anchor.

In terms of its suitability for adaptation, Patricia Tatspaugh argues that *Romeo and Juliet* 'invites an exploration of social issues, survives transpositions of time and place, accommodates multi-cultural casting and, of course, dramatises the timeless conflict between generations'.¹³⁶ She also suggests that the play is easier to adapt than the other love tragedies: *Othello*, for example, raises issues of racism and sexism, whilst *Antony and Cleopatra* is 'the most demanding', presumably (although not overtly stated by Tatspaugh) because of its large geographical range. She also notes that both *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* have few moments of 'bliss and fulfilment' or, alternatively, scenes of 'face-to-face confrontation and conflict'.¹³⁷ These two factors tend to be a staple of mainstream drama because the main characters are often involved in a romantic subplot.

¹³⁴ Rothwell, pp. 229-32.

¹³⁵ Jackson, pp. 31-2.

¹³⁶ Patricia Tatspaugh in *ibid.* p. 141.

¹³⁷ Patricia Tatspaugh in *ibid.*

Although this chapter focuses on Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), there are similarities with three other adaptations that Tatspaugh mentions, created by Cukor in 1936, Castellani in 1954 and Zeffirelli in 1968. Each of these films sought to make the 'young lovers attractive to the cinema audience and to portray realistically the society in which Romeo and Juliet live'.¹³⁸ The directors also made significant cuts to the text: Cukor omitted 55 per cent, excising scenes that are:

traditionally cut (such as Chorus 2, the musicians), substituting action for dialogue (Capulet's servants, taking their cue from Capulet's instructions in Act 4 scene 4, convey the grief of the household and bridegroom), reassigning dialogue from several servants to enlarge the comic role of Peter, a faint-hearted bully. Cukor also retains Juliet's long speech 'I have a faint cold fear' (4.3.129), which 'both Zeffirelli and Luhrmann cut altogether and from which Castellani cuts nearly one third'.¹³⁹

Tatspaugh calculates that Zeffirelli cut 65 per cent of the text, and 'excised, for example, Juliet's soliloquy before drinking the potion and Romeo's attempted suicide, his visit to the apothecary and his murder of Paris'. My research indicates that Luhrmann cut a similar figure – approximately 68 per cent.

However, in stylistic terms, where Zeffirelli 'imbues his film with a zest for life and love', Luhrmann's film is 'far darker' and is a modern dress adaptation that 'isolates Romeo and Juliet within the crass, violent and superficial society of Verona Beach and Sycamore Grove, [and] its shabby amusement park'. Tatspaugh describes the ways Luhrmann heightens 'the vulnerability and attractiveness of Romeo and Juliet' by juxtaposing them with

¹³⁸ Patricia Tatspaugh in *ibid.* pp. 141-2.

¹³⁹ Patricia Tatspaugh in *ibid.* p. 143.

the ‘Capulets’ ostentatious and tasteless display of wealth, Capulet’s physical violence with his disobedient daughter, the city-paralysing violence of the feuding families, the omnipresent guns and readily accessible drugs, Christian symbols stripped of meaning and translated into designer ornaments or rococo artefacts’.¹⁴⁰ Crowl also describes the ‘pictorial romanticism’ inherent in the setting of the scene where Romeo and Juliet take their lives’; a brightly lit church with ‘neon crosses, a blaze of candles, flowers and rose petals’; this is in marked contrast to the ‘dark and dank family vault’ described by Shakespeare for this event.¹⁴¹ He goes on to observe that Luhrmann also cuts the lines in which ‘Montague and Capulet try to outbid each other in raising golden statues of their dead children’, possibly because he realises that ‘his film has already provided the equivalent visual apotheosis of the lovers’.¹⁴²

The closing of the film sees Luhrmann excise ‘the exchange of forgiveness’ between Capulet and Montague and the final shot is ‘the bleak image of a flickering, unwatched television set’.¹⁴³ What, speculates Tatspaugh, happened to the viewer of that television – did they find the story too painful to watch or were they unmoved? Luhrmann provides the answer, to a degree, in his final scene prior to the epilogue, when he gave some visual indications that the community had learned its lesson. Although verbal forgiveness was eschewed, the daylight images are pale and washed out compared to the richness of the church interior; listless, pallid people observe the bodies being taken away in white body bags. The sense is that this is a community that will be peaceful – at least for the immediate future: it needs no further words of explanation.

¹⁴⁰ Patricia Tatspaugh in *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Crowl, p. 124.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Patricia Tatspaugh in Jackson, pp. 147-9.

Rothwell describes Luhrmann's version as a 'Generation X' film, and notes the camera directions in the screenplay (Whip Pan, Super Macro Slam Zoom) that were unheard of when Zeffirelli made his version in 1968. It is a film 'filtered through John Woo's Hong Kong action movies, and the hiphop and gangsta rap of MTV, yet the characters speak in Elizabethan English'.¹⁴⁴ Crowl notes that 'Luhrmann takes his Shakespearean material more deeply into cinematic language than any other director in the Branagh era', referring in particular to the 'zooms, jumps and slams' of the camerawork and that it seemed to simultaneously 'transcend and deify its Shakespearean source'.¹⁴⁵ Rothwell also quotes Luhrmann's intention to make his film 'rambunctious, sexy, violent, and entertaining the way Shakespeare might have if he had been a filmmaker'.¹⁴⁶ Crowl also notes the power of the specific, yet non-specific cityscape: a fusion of Mexico City, Miami and Los Angeles. As he notes, 'this place we see emerges from some other place that cannot be known, though people know that it is there and know that ignoring it is as fatal as the result coming from it'.¹⁴⁷

Crowl goes on to argue that 'the success of the images drives Shakespeare's language into becoming the film's subtext rather than its text'. Crowl quotes Geoffrey O'Brien's complaint that Luhrmann's handling of the language is 'skittish' and that 'any speech longer than a few lines just gets in the way.'. O'Brien concludes that the text 'begins to seem like an embarrassment that everybody is trying to avoid facing up to'. Crowl does point out an alternative interpretation, which is that Luhrmann is 'so successful at creating a visual environment to match Shakespeare's language that his film ends up,

¹⁴⁴ Rothwell, pp. 229-32.

¹⁴⁵ Crowl, p. 120.

¹⁴⁶ Rothwell, pp. 229-32.

¹⁴⁷ Crowl, p. 127.

unintentionally, overpowering it'.¹⁴⁸ He also argues that the changes that Luhrmann makes alter the tone of the story with 'the film repeatedly suggest[ing] that *Romeo and Juliet* is more a tragedy of fate than of generational conflict or immature passion'.¹⁴⁹ One way in which Luhrmann facilitates this mood is the insertion of an early flash-forward of Romeo walking between neon crosses – a vision that becomes reality at the end of the film. He notes that neither this flash-forward, nor the one related to Juliet (when she mentions her 'ill-divining soul'), are featured in the screenplay. Although Crowl suggests that this might exaggerate the role of Fate, it may also be the result of Luhrmann wanting to make the story more comprehensible through the use of redundancy when the viewers arrive at the climactic scene. As discussed in Chapter One, such interpolations are powerful ways of prompting viewers to build hypotheses; in the case of Romeo the questions might include 'where is this place, how does he get there, and what happens?'.¹⁵⁰

Reviewing these observations, they are not atypical of the criticisms made of the film, which focus on the visual style and the level of cuts made. What the comments touch on, but do not delve into particularly deeply, is the degree to which changes have been made to the overall story structure, how this maps against the master schema of the classical Hollywood story model, and whether they make the story easier to understand on film. In addition, how do changes made to individual characters affect the comprehension of the original story when these films are being used for educational purposes? These questions – in relation to *Romeo + Juliet* - are the subject of this chapter.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 128-9.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 131.

¹⁵⁰ As noted in Chapter One, a flash-forward can only be identified in retrospect, although it is likely that many people will presume that it links to the ending.

The sources and elements of Shakespeare's story

The story originated in Italy during the fifteenth century, in a collection of stories by Salernitano (1476), before migrating to England via France over the next 90 years. In 1562 Arthur Brooke adopted it as the basis for his verse translation, which became the main source for Shakespeare's dramatic adaptation written in the mid-1590s. In essence there are twelve core incidents in the *Romeo and Juliet* story, which Levenson expresses in the following manner:

1. Romeo's initial, abortive love affair;
2. The Capulet feast, where Romeo and Juliet first encounter each other and immediately become enamoured;
3. The meeting at Juliet's house, when they plan to marry;
4. The carrying out of these plans with the assistance of a friar;
5. The brawl between Montagues and Capulets which leads to Romeo's banishment
6. Romeo and Juliet's leave-taking of each other
7. The Capulets' arrangement for Juliet to marry a man of their choice
8. Juliet's appeal to the friar for help, resulting in the potion scheme
9. Juliet's false death, reported to the exiled Romeo as true
10. The scene in the tomb, where both lovers die
11. The governor's distribution of justice
12. The reconciliation of the two families.¹⁵¹

Taking this inherited backbone from Brooke's poem, Shakespeare adds scenes and passages 'which enlarge the social worlds of the lovers before reducing them, and which therefore complicate relationships with families or friends'. This

¹⁵¹ Jill L. Levenson ed., *Romeo and Juliet*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 7-8.

means that the changes of adolescence ‘set off repercussions at every level of the action’.¹⁵²

This gives rise to five main areas of divergence between Brooke’s and Shakespeare’s versions of the story. The first is the development of Capulet’s role, which sees his patriarchal position appended by domestic duties as he ‘busily engages in his daughter’s marriage arrangements, rushing them along from 3.4’.¹⁵³ Capulet’s age also becomes an important factor in Shakespeare’s rendition and his dialogue with Paris revealing that ‘old Capulet feels his mortality’; the idea of ageing is then reinforced during Capulet’s dialogue with his cousin in 1.5. Against this background Capulet is seen to be ‘los[ing] his grip, more visibly than Montague, on his authority as patriarch’.¹⁵⁴ Importantly, ‘[T]he family episode, *in its sheer bulk*, represents the sheer obduracy which the lovers face’ (my italics).¹⁵⁵ In other words, what appears to be important to Shakespeare is the amount of familial interaction and its effects upon Romeo and Juliet

A second distinction between Shakespeare and the source material is the presence of servants: there ‘are servants for everything from delivering messages to serving food’; two of them open the play (Samson and Gregory); in addition, there is a greatly expanded role for another servant, the Nurse, who ‘holds a privileged position’ in the narrative. Their presence is important in the sense that these scenes of domesticity ‘alternate at regular intervals’ with scenes of violence in the play: thus highlighting the essential threat to the domestic sphere from the violence that ‘was an intransigent reality in early modern England’.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 21.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. pp. 38-39.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 21.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 20, 35.

A third difference from the source material can be seen in the characters of Mercutio, Benvolio and Tybalt. The former was ‘invented from a few sentences in the original narratives’ where he is merely a rival for Juliet’s love who is rejected for having cold hands;¹⁵⁷ Shakespeare also invented Benvolio’s various narrations and he, along with Mercutio, play a crucial role as they become involved in the lovers’ story in a way not seen in the original narratives. Benvolio takes it upon himself to discover the source of Romeo’s sadness (1.1); in the Queen Mab speech (1.4) Mercutio mocks Romeo’s portentous dreams and persuades him to attend the Capulet feast; Benvolio warns Romeo to leave the feast immediately following the revelation of Juliet as a Capulet (1.5); prior to the so-called balcony scene (2.1) Mercutio indulges in increasingly vulgar sexual comparisons; and the two young men then exchange banter prior to Romeo arriving and meeting the Nurse (2.3.1-134). Mercutio also appears to view women as a threat to male friendship and focuses on their impoverishing power, describing Romeo as a ‘dried herring’ (2.3.36); he also demeans women, particularly in his insults to Nurse (2.3); lastly, he makes frequent references to what he imagines to be Romeo’s sex life at 1.4.20-6 and 2.1.35-9. All of these interventions function, argues Levenson, to ‘accentuate Romeo’s growing distance from their [Mercutio and Benvolio’s] social life’.¹⁵⁸ Possibly one of the most significant changes made by Shakespeare is the role of Tybalt, who is made considerably more important in Shakespeare’s play than he is in Brooke’s source material where he only becomes involved in the narrative several months after

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 25.

FRIAR L. Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.
 Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote
 The unreasonable fury of a beast.
 Unseemly woman in a seeming man (3.3.108-12)

FRIAR L. Thy noble shape is but a form of wax,
 Digressing from the valour of a man (3.3.125-6)

FRIAR L. But, like a mishavèd and sullen wench,
 Thou pout'st upon thy fortune, and thy love (3.3.142-3)

Finally, in the Act 5, Shakespeare invents 'Romeo's dream and recollections of the apothecary's shop in 5.1, and his encounter with Paris in 5.3'.¹⁶² Clearly, one area of interest is the degree to which these various events feature in the finished film.

Romeo and Juliet: The scale of the adaptation challenge

What then is the scale of the challenge faced by Baz Luhrmann and his co-writer Craig Pearce when adapting the text of *Romeo and Juliet*? What is immediately apparent is that the length of the original text (24,016 words) is twice as long as the average for mainstream film (circa 10,00 words). This suggests that the cuts to *Romeo and Juliet* would need to be around 58% to bring it in line with this average. In fact, Luhrmann's film has 7764 words, which is 68% shorter than the Norton text. In other words, he chose to cut more than was absolutely necessary in numerical terms. It may be objected that this gross figure does not take account of the fact that the average film might be 120 minutes long, whereas Luhrmann's film was just 108 minutes long – therefore, words spoken per minute of screen time might be a more accurate comparison. When this calculation is done the average film would have 83 words per minute, (10,000/120) whereas *Romeo+Juliet* has just 72 words per minute (7764/108). In

¹⁶² Ibid. pp. 26, 29, 19.

other words, at a very basic level *Romeo+Juliet* (1996) conforms to the basic expectation that dialogue exchanges in a mainstream film are relatively short. As discussed earlier, because film tends to be more of a visual than a verbal medium, dialogue tends to be relatively simple and easy to understand. In contrast, Shakespeare's poetic language is more complex and requires a level of auditory attention that can be difficult to sustain in the context of the multi-layered visual stimuli present on the screen. As a result, it might be argued that using less Shakespearean dialogue than the average may actually increase the possibility of comprehension.

Another key aspect of film dialogue is that speech lengths tend to be 12-15 words long.¹⁶³ Looking at the Norton text of *Romeo and Juliet* it is immediately clear that Luhrmann faced a significant problem. The *average* for virtually all of the main characters substantially exceeds the mainstream norm: Friar Lawrence (44 words), Juliet (34 words), Capulet (33 words), Prince (32 words) and Montague (29 words) and Romeo (26 words). The problem this creates is that a speech of 30 words requires the camera to focus on a character for 10 seconds, which screenwriting teacher McKee warns is approaching the limit for a single shot: 'Within ten or fifteen seconds the audience's eye absorbs everything visually expressive and the shot becomes redundant'; the result is that 'you lose the audience'. A director could theoretically overcome this problem by cutting away to another shot but McKee cautions against such a solution because it merely creates another problem: 'when we disembody a voice, the actor must

¹⁶³ This estimate is based on my own close analysis of seven mainstream films and seems to hold true for many other screenplays.

slow down and overarticulate because the audience, in effect, lip-reads'.¹⁶⁴ This becomes even more of an issue when considering how many times a character speaks: Juliet, for example, speaks 127 times at an average of 34 words (roughly 11 seconds per time). In other words, whilst cutaways can be used on occasions, they are not a sustainable long-term solution. What is clear is that Luhrmann managed to address this issue, with all but three of the leading characters in the film averaging just 10-17 words per speech. In summary, Luhrmann clearly addressed two of the main issues facing him, by cutting the overall length of the text and by reducing speech lengths to a level that is compatible with mainstream films; what it does not reveal is how Luhrmann effected the cuts and whether this altered the storyline.

These initial statistics give an overall idea of the level of cuts (68%) and the effect on speech lengths; what they do not do is to offer any insight into whether the cuts were executed equally across the storyline as a whole.¹⁶⁵ When this process is completed what becomes apparent is that the cuts are disproportionately focused on the final two Acts (see Table below).

	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3	Act 4	Act 5	Total
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	5658	5379	6403	3179	3397	24,016
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	2416	2101	2104	505	638	7764
<i>Percentage cut</i>	57%	61%	67%	84%	81%	68%

¹⁶⁴ Robert McKee, *Story : Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, (London: Methuen, 1999), p. 390.

¹⁶⁵ Luhrmann intercuts between scenes (or parts of scenes), uses some text out of order and interpolates text from other plays. As a result, the cuts to Acts and Scenes were calculated by copying words from the Luhrmann screenplay and doing a word search for them in the original Norton text: the words can then be marked with the relevant Act and Scene number and reassembled in the original Act order.

The question this raises is whether these cuts substantially change the number and order of events in the play and thus the interpretation of the story? Looking at the twelve main structural events in the play, they are all present in roughly the same order in the film but one composite event (the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt) is arranged differently (see Table below).

Event	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton) ¹⁶⁶	<i>Romeo+Juliet</i> (1996)
(1.1.1--96) A new outbreak of Capulet/Montague hostilities.	Page 4-6 (of 139 pages) 3-4%	00:05:04 - 00:09:14 (of 01:48:00 running time) 5-8%
(Reported at 1.1.197) Romeo in love (with Rosaline)	Page 16 12%	00:15:00 14%
(1.3.67) Juliet told that Paris wants to marry her.	Page 20 14%	00:16:35 15%
(1.5.38-141) Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love.	Page 35 21-25%	00:25:35 - 00:31:35 23-29%
(2.5.37) Romeo and Juliet are married	Page 65 47%	00:55:00 51%
(3.1.51-3.1.127) Outbreak of hostilities leads to the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt.	Page 71 51%	01:06:30 62%
(4.3.57) Juliet takes the sleeping potion	Page 111 80%	01:27:30 81%
(5.3.1- 5.3.169) Romeo and then Juliet kill themselves.	Page 129-133 93-96%	01:39:30-01:45:40 91-97%
(5.3.170-309) The effect of the deaths on the wider community.	Page 133-139 96-100%	01:46:00 of 01:48:00 97-100%

¹⁶⁶ These page numbers refer to the way the transcribed Norton text is paginated in *Final Draft*.

What is notable here (from a purely macro-structural point-of-view) is that the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt occur roughly halfway through the play and is the event that spins the action in a new and catastrophic direction. In contrast, Luhrmann dramatizes the marriage of Romeo and Juliet and makes it the central event of his film. Using very little dialogue the wedding in church is typical of romantic summary sequences and concludes the first half of the story. The effect of this decision does, however, push the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt further down the order and these fall 62% of the way through the story. This later timing is not because a huge number of other events have been interpolated between the marriage and the two deaths, but because, as noted earlier, Luhrmann cuts so much of the final two Acts.

This decision to cut material in the second half of the story brings the film into line with the mainstream screenplay paradigm, which recommends that a story follows a central character (or characters) relatively closely. In contrast, the play's structure takes Romeo off-stage for the majority of 3.5 and the whole of Act 4; Juliet is then 'dead' during the longest scene of Act 4 (4.4) and only speaks for 21 lines in Act 5 (5.3.148-169). The severe cutting of Acts 4 and 5 (as will be analysed in more detail below) eliminates much of the action that does not feature Romeo and Juliet. Apart from this difference it is striking that Luhrmann's story is mainly chronological and follows the sequence of events as laid out in the play (with minor degrees of intercutting).

Changes in role lengths in *Romeo+Juliet* (1996)

The next step in assessing the interpretational impact of the cuts is to look at how it affects role sizes and the focus of the story.¹⁶⁷ Whilst analysis has been done on the percentage of lines given to each character,¹⁶⁸ a more useful measure, from the perspective of comparing film adaptations, is to know how many words each role comprises. Comparing Luhrmann's version of the text (see Table below), it is evident that the balance of the main roles (in percentage terms) is similar in the main roles but different in some of the supporting roles.

	Romeo	Juliet	Friar L	Nurse	Capulet	Mercutio
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	19%	17%	11%	9%	8%	8%
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	20%	17%	11%	5%	4%	10%

In percentage terms the bigger reductions are the Nurse (down from 9% to 5%) and Capulet (down from 8% to 4%); this effectively moves them from being important secondary characters to minor supporting roles. The clown role of Peter disappears completely as a character, albeit some of his dialogue is given to several other minor characters (for example the invite to the Capulet feast is given to two TV newscasters). In contrast, it can also be seen that the role of Mercutio (from 8% to 10%) increases in relative terms.

Another way of analysing the changes is to look at the absolute amount of dialogue that is cut: this shows that Nurse, Capulet and Montague lose 80-82%

¹⁶⁷ One of the reasons that word count is a more relevant comparative measure is that most iambic lines do not tend to fit within the standard template for dialogue in *Final Draft*. For example, the opening line of *Romeo and Juliet* formats as 'Two households, both alike in | dignity'. In addition, it is possible that textual deletions will not necessarily respect lineal integrity, rendering comparisons of full lines invalid.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. William Shakespeare, Jonathan Bate, and Eric Rasmussen, *Complete Works : The RSC Shakespeare*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007).

of their dialogue, far more than the 68% average for the play as a whole (see Table below).

	Romeo	Juliet	Friar L	Nurse	Capulet	Mercutio	Paris
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996) <i>Percentage of dialogue cut</i>	64%	68%	67%	80%	81%	58%	75%

From an interpretational perspective these adjustments diminish the relevance of the Capulet family group, enhance the position of characters as individuals, and bring the story into line with the mainstream film story model. The tendency of the mainstream story to downplay the communal and everyday in favour of the individual and dramatic is something Sarah Hatchuel picks up. She observes that Hollywood movies tend to ‘give greater importance to the intense moments and deny the repetitive aspects of everyday life’: this is certainly true of *Romeo + Juliet*.¹⁶⁹

Why the active characters with a goal are less severely cut

Given the observation (above) that the first half of the story of the play is less heavily cut in comparison to the second half, it is perhaps unsurprising to see that Tybalt and Mercutio’s roles are enhanced. Although Tybalt has one of the shortest roles in *Romeo and Juliet*, with ‘only four lines more than Balthasar and six fewer than Montague’, he is ‘crucial to the plot, his presence vastly more important than the number of lines’.¹⁷⁰ Tybalt’s importance arises as a result of Shakespeare recreating him as the key antagonist and repositioning him at the beginning of the action. In contrast, Tybalt only becomes involved in the narrative several months after Romeo and Juliet’s marriage in the main source

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare, from Stage to Screen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 72.

¹⁷⁰ Weis ed., p. 47.

for the story, Brooke's *Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562).¹⁷¹ In Luhrmann's film he loses only 22% of his speaking role (cut from 263 to 206 words) and, as noted earlier, is instrumental in reigniting the fight that Benvolio is trying to calm in the opening scene (1.1.59).

One definition of a film scene is one where there is 'action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space' that results in 'meaningful change in the life situation of character'.¹⁷² In the case of Tybalt, there is conflict and action in every scene in which he appears. He has very clear objectives that, if successfully achieved, will result in a visible change in the external world. These objectives might be summarized as follows: (1.1) to kill Benvolio because he is a Montague; (1.5) to kill any Montague on the basis of their accent and then to kill Romeo specifically; and finally (3.1) to kill Romeo. From a practical perspective, Tybalt's speeches (in the Norton text) do not need a huge amount of doctoring for length: they average just 15 words per speech so the need to cut was minimal (in fact, Luhrmann managed to reduce this figure to 11 words per speech). This is not to suggest that the cuts that are made do not have an impact. In 1.5 the first lines cut are: 'This, by his voice, should be a Montague. | Fetch me my rapier, boy.' What is lost is the subtlety that each of these families, contained within a tight geographical area, has their own individual accent and that this alone can mark them out for violent attack.¹⁷³

In Tybalt's third and final scene (3.1) he defies Capulet and confronts Romeo and Mercutio, killing the latter before being killed by the former. This

¹⁷¹ Broke and others

¹⁷² McKee, pp. 33-35.

¹⁷³ This suggests a highly localized set of identifiers in Verona. The danger of being recognized by your accent can also be found in the Biblical account of the people of Gilead; they identified, and then killed, thousands of Ephraimites on the basis of their inability to pronounce the word Shibboleth. (Judges 12:5-6).

scene prompts the banishment of Romeo, which I argue is the result of this major reversal at the Midpoint of the play (a subject that I will return to later in this chapter). In Tybalt, Shakespeare has created a character who adapts well to the film environment: he acts when others talk, he is antagonistic and has clear, visible goals. This helps to explain why, although his role is short, it is important and less severely cut than any other character. It also supports Franco Zeffirelli's advice to the actor Michael York, who was told that he wouldn't regret taking on the role of Tybalt in Zeffirelli's film version back in 1968.¹⁷⁴

The other character whose role is less severely cut in the film version is Mercutio: his role is cut by 58% as opposed to the 68% average for all of the characters. Again, this is a character refashioned by Shakespeare: in Brooke's poem he is a competitor for Juliet's love. Shakespeare expanded his character to the point where he performs a 'pivotal role in the play, Horatio to Romeo's Hamlet'.¹⁷⁵ It is undoubtedly true that the combination of Mercutio's energy, wit and drive make him exceptionally attractive as a character on stage and film. There is also the very real sense that Mercutio has been recast by Shakespeare to represent the essence of the youthful, male culture that Romeo is migrating from by falling in love with Rosaline and then Juliet. Weis argues that possibly Mercutio's most valuable role is that he is the 'obverse of romantic love', embodying a 'full-blooded sensuality ... set very purposefully against Romeo's romantic idealism'.¹⁷⁶ It is Mercutio's anchoring presence that prevents the story from becoming too sugary sweet. It is, therefore, no surprise to see that

¹⁷⁴ Weis ed., p. 47.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 49. It is arguable that Benvolio is a better analogue to Horatio than Mercutio (as the honest counsellor and narrator of events), but Weis's central point is still valid: Mercutio does hold a pivotal role.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 59.

Mercutio's role in the film is relatively prominent: although his role is still reduced from 2099 words to 882.

This raises the question of where the cuts to his role fell. Looking at the breakdown the most severe cuts (in percentage terms) fall in scene 2.1 when Mercutio is making an attempt to ensure that Romeo leaves the Capulet house and returns with his all-male group (see Table below). What becomes evident is that these cuts focus on dialogue that is either difficult to understand on a first hearing, does not drive the action forward or refers to relatively obscure characters (such as Cophetua, a king who was not sexually attracted to women until he saw a partially clothed beggar-maid, and then fell instantly in love with her and proposed marriage).

MERCUTIO: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.3	3.1
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	553	0	260	705	581
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	287	9	58	280	248
<i>Percentage of dialogue cut</i>	48	0	78	60	57

From the perspective of the mainstream classical model, the dialogue that remains is straightforward, comprehensible and links to a clear intention: Mercutio wants the unseen Romeo to return with them, although he fails in his attempt and then leaves.

However, the cuts also rob the scene of some of its complexity and go to the heart of the difference between film and theatre. In the play Mercutio uses the power of language in three stages in an attempt to penetrate Romeo's consciousness and draw him back to the group. He initially tries to conjure him using words associated with love, but with no success (2.1.4-15). He moves on to describe Rosaline's physical attributes, which ironically are no longer of interest

to Romeo (2.1.16-21). When this also fails he begins to make obscene sexual references that ends with Mercutio wishing that 'she' (notably not named as Rosaline) was sexually available to Romeo – presumably because this would stop Romeo's melancholy longing for her: 'O Romeo, that she were, O that she were | An open-arse, and thou a popp'r in pear' (2.1.37-39).

Mercutio's role suffers the largest cuts in numerical terms in 2.3 (being reduced from 705 to 280 words). At the beginning of this scene (2.3.1-31) he is discussing the missing Romeo with Benvolio and much of this initial exchange was included in the film, despite the fact that it has an archaic nature and is largely expository. This decision may, at first glance, appear somewhat arbitrary but, looking more closely at the content, its inclusion can be justified because it pertains to Tybalt's fighting ability and sets up the conflict that will result in the death of Mercutio. From a story perspective, it also offers a break from the Romeo and Juliet love plot whilst providing a reminder of the threat of violence hanging over the lovers' relationship. Following Romeo's arrival Luhrmann again appears to have followed a similar strategy: the classical allusions are deleted, whilst the obscure but relatively comprehensible 'bonjour' dialogue remains. This latter choice can be justified by the fact that it is used to express the subtext: Mercutio is annoyed with Romeo for deserting them for a female.

In summary, it is clear that two supporting characters whose roles are less severely cut are both active, both have clear goals and appear (exclusively) in the first half of the story. However, characters that mainly feature in the second half of the story fare less well (in terms of role sizes).

Why the characters related to the Capulet family are more severely cut

When looking in detail at the changes by character it is obvious that, with the exception of one scene (2.4: see Table below), the cuts to the Nurse's role are substantial (68% or more). This is understandable on the basis that Scene 2.4 features her interactions with Romeo and Mercutio and her function as a go-between. In other words, her presence enhances the comprehension of the storyline, because we learn how and why the couple meet, and that Romeo has suggested marriage. In addition scene 2.4 also inserts a deadline to meet ('this afternoon').

NURSE: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.3	1.5	2.1	2.3	2.4	3.2	3.3	3.5	4.2	4.4
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	522	94	2	456	322	232	172	177	11	239
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	59	30	6	53	165	0	48	90	0	0
<i>Percentage reduction by scene</i>	89	68	0	88	49	100	72	49	100	100

This diminution of the Nurse's role is important because, as René Weis points out: 'we learn more biographical details about Juliet's history than we do with any other character in Shakespeare, mostly through Nurse's affectionate, if embarrassing banter'.¹⁷⁷ This detail is omitted in Luhrmann's film because much of the biographical 'banter' occurs in scene 1.3, where Nurse's role has been literally decimated. It is here that intimate details about Juliet's infancy are revealed, including:

1. The Nurse knows Juliet's age to the day (her biological mother does not).
2. The Nurse's knowledge of Juliet's age is linked to Lammas, the day the harvest begins.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 3.

3. The Nurse lost a child (Susan) who would have been the same age as Juliet
4. The Nurse wet-nursed Juliet and has become her surrogate mother
5. The Nurse recalls the earthquake that occurred on the day that Juliet was weaned: when she was three-years-old. The mention of the earthquake helps to foreshadow the emotional earthquake that will shake Verona.
6. The Nurse links the Capulets to Mantua: this is the first mention of the place to which Romeo will be banished.
7. Weaning via the bitter taste of wormwood foreshadows the eventual rejection of Nurse by Juliet: 'Thou and my bosom shall henceforth be twain' (3.5.240).
8. The Nurse's comments about Juliet falling and injuring herself foreshadow Juliet falling in love and dying.
9. The re-telling of the Nurse's husband's joke (about Juliet voluntarily falling on her back when she is old enough) is a reminder of the subservient sexual and social role of women in that society.
10. The Nurse expresses a desire (like a good parent) to see Juliet well married.

Although she is a clown character, there is something touching about this affection, not least because Shakespeare takes pains to articulate the fact that the Nurse lost a daughter in infancy (Susan) and that this girl would now have been Juliet's age had she lived. This richness of contextual detail, argues Weis, helps to place the focus of the play 'squarely on Juliet' and differentiates her from Romeo, who by comparison is a mere 'cipher'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

However, whilst the cuts lead to losses of biographical detail, they also make the scene 1.3 much easier to follow. And as Bordwell notes, the mainstream model is predicated on ease of comprehension: ‘we intuitively recognize an ordinary, easily comprehensible movie when we see it’.¹⁷⁹ Another way of thinking about this is to look at the definition of a scene in the books that are written as guides for screenplay writers (normally referred to as screenplay manuals). One such book suggests that a scene is ‘an action through conflict in more or less continuous time and space’ that results in ‘meaningful change in the life situation of character’.¹⁸⁰ The primary conflict in scene 1.3 is between the mother and the daughter: one is suggesting marriage and the other adjusting to the shock news. The person’s whose situation undergoes the most significant change is Juliet: she goes from 14-year-old carefree girl to potential wife and possibly mother. In comparison, much of the Nurse’s dialogue is what Chatman terms a satellite: the loss of it may impoverish the narrative aesthetically but is not essential to the development of the story.¹⁸¹

A similar level of cuts can be seen in Scene 2.3, in which Nurse’s role is cut from 456 to 53 words. What becomes clear is that, although there is conflict between Nurse and Mercutio, there is very little at stake for her. The dialogue that is cut does not materially affect the development of either the main story or Nurse’s personal character development. Her primary objective in this scene is to find out whether Romeo has good intentions towards Juliet: Luhrmann’s edits achieve this.

¹⁷⁹ Bordwell, p. 156.

¹⁸⁰ McKee, pp. 33-35.

¹⁸¹ Chatman, p. 54.

As the story progresses, however, there are two cuts in the Nurse's role that do affect her character, and the wider impact of the story, more significantly. In Scene 3.2 the Nurse not only tells Juliet of Tybalt's death but offers a new dimension to his character: 'O Tybalt, Tybalt, the best friend I had!' (3.2.61). This cut may not seem like an enormous loss but Nurse's words do amplify the close and unstable relationship between love and hate that was noted by Romeo in the opening scene of the play: 'Here's much to do with hate, but more with love' (1.1.168). Therefore, this seemingly insignificant line of the Nurse's helps to illustrate that Tybalt may hate Montagues but appears to be capable of affection if you happen to be part of the Capulet family group: this makes his character slightly more complex. Secondly, in the film it is the Friar that discovers Juliet 'dead' in her bed, as opposed to the Nurse who, in the play, is preparing to wake Juliet on what is a big day for the Nurse as the surrogate mother (4.4.28). The omission of these moments in the film erodes the nurturing aspect of the Nurse's character, along with the moment when she realizes her surrogate daughter has met the same fate as her biological daughter Susan.

There is, however, one scene in which Nurse retains a fairly prominent role (2.4) and her dialogue is only cut by 49% (from 322 to 165 words). What can be clearly seen is that there is a purpose in leaving in more of the Nurse's dialogue in this scene. She has information that Juliet wants her to impart: does Romeo have an intention to marry, and if so, where and when? This is one of the few moments where Nurse holds the power in a scene (1.3.12-64 is another) and she uses this opportunity to great effect, constantly postponing the news and creating conflict between her and Juliet. The text that is cut here contains expositional material that, it can be argued, is not particularly germane to the

main plot; other cuts relate to actions that are subsequently omitted (the ‘ladder’ is never used in the film because Romeo simply appears in Juliet’s room). The latter is a good example of how Luhrmann uses the audience’s knowledge of schemata: we just accept that Romeo got into the house – it is not particularly important that we know how. Whilst more of the dialogue is retained compared to the other scenes, the emendations that Luhrmann made are consistent: exposition is cut and the focus remains on dramatic conflict.

As noted above, the other main role in the family group to be severely truncated is that of Capulet (cut by 81%): he is, in fact, completely removed from half of the scenes in which he appears in the play (see Table below).

CAPULET: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.1	1.2	1.5	3.4	3.5	4.2	4.4	5.3
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	26	255	440	263	494	208	363	71
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	0	113	90	74	124	0	0	0
<i>Percentage reduction by scene</i>	100	55	80	72	75	100	100	100

The changes begin with Capulet’s very first line, ‘Give me my long sword, ho!’ (1.1.68) which is transferred to Montague. This has a two-fold effect: firstly, it helps to deflect attention from the fact that, in the play, it is the Capulets that incite the trouble in the first scene; this excision is consistent with Luhrmann’s decision to make Samson and Gregory into Montagues instead of Capulets and changing line 1.1.7 to read: ‘A dog of the house of Capulet moves me’.¹⁸²

Secondly, the response to Capulet’s request for his sword is cut altogether, with

¹⁸² Several of the words at the beginning of *Romeo+Juliet* have been imported from other plays and re-contextualized to function as scatological insults. These include ‘King Urinal’ (*Merry Wives of Windsor*, 2.3.31), ‘pedlar’s excrement’ (*Winter’s Tale*, 4.4.713-14) and ‘go rot!’ (*Winter’s Tale*, 1.2.326). For more detail on the various textual borrowings and interpolations in this film see Toby Malone’s essay ‘Behind the Red Curtain of Verona Beach’ in *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 65*: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/SSO9781139170000.029>

his wife suggesting that the old man would be better looking for 'A crutch, a crutch' (1.1.69). This omission is important in the sense that the original line suggests that Capulet is old and losing his authority. This idea of fading power is reinforced in the play during Act 4 when he tries to assume some of the women's duties, saying 'I'll play the housewife for this once' (4.2.43). This, in turn, leads to the Nurse describing him as a 'cot-quean' (4.4.6), whilst his wife tells him he should go to bed because he needs his sleep: 'you have been a mouse-hunt in your time, | But I will watch you from such watching this time.' (4.4.11-12). All of this contextual detail suggests that Shakespeare placed some importance on the idea of Capulet being an ageing man whose authority is waning.

Capulet's dialogue is then completely cut in the scenes where he prepares for his daughter's wedding to Paris (4.2 and 4.4), which allows Luhrmann to concentrate Capulet's appearances on moments of conflict connected to the main storyline. In 1.2 he is conflicted because he wants his daughter to marry well, but he also wants her to be older before she marries: his solution is to postpone the issue by suggesting that Paris waits two years to marry Juliet; in 1.5 he temporarily manages to restrain Tybalt with the question 'Am I the master here, or you?' (1.5.75); in 3.4 he takes the fateful decision that Paris can marry Juliet, leading to the violent clash with his daughter (3.5). Following this final confrontation Capulet effectively disappears from the film (Juliet's apology to Capulet in scene 4.2 is cut in the film); he makes just two fleeting appearances at what he believes is his daughter's funeral (01:28:15) and as the bodies are brought out following the double-suicide (01:47.00-01:48.000): both of these appearances are non-speaking.¹⁸³ These choices make sense because they

¹⁸³Baz Luhrmann, 'Romeo + Juliet', (Twentieth Century Fox, 1996). Running Time 115 minutes

maintain the forward momentum of the main plotline. Nevertheless, the cuts do remove the sense that the inter-family rivalry between the Montagues and the Capulets may be, in part, due to Capulet's waning powers and his increasingly ineffectual strategies to maintain his authority. In addition, the cuts highlight how the effects of Juliet's actions on her family are reduced compared to the stage text, resulting in an enhanced focus on the two main characters.

The other relatively prominent supporting role to be cut by more than the average is Paris (75%), who goes from 542 words in the play to 136 words in the film. What is obvious from the Table (below) is that over half of Paris's role falls in two scenes late in the story – 4.4 where he discovers that Juliet is 'dead' and 5.3 where he confronts Romeo and is killed. The first deletion (in 4.4) removes Paris's assertion that he loved Juliet, rather than just wanting to marry her out of convenience.

PARIS: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.2	1.5 184	3.4	4.1	4.4	5.3
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	32	0	28	185	46	251
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	32	6	18	80	0	0
<i>Percentage reduction by scene</i>	0	0	36	57	100	100

The second series of cuts (5.3) arises from Luhrmann's decision to completely excise Paris's fight with Romeo outside the Capulet tomb: the result is that the emotional sympathy that the viewer feels for Romeo is not compromised by him murdering an innocent character.¹⁸⁵ One advantage of these cuts is that, again, it keeps the focus on the two main characters and Paris becomes no more than a semi-vacant clown.

¹⁸⁴ Paris is given an invented line to say to Juliet in this scene: 'Will you now deny to dance?'

¹⁸⁵ This cut is hardly unprecedented because, as Weis points out, 'Zeffirelli removed Paris from Act 5 of [his version of *Romeo and Juliet*, 1968]': Weis ed., p. 81.

Why cuts to the second half of the story simplify Juliet's character

What is known from the overview earlier in this chapter is that Juliet's dialogue is cut by 68%, but evaluating the way the role was reduced for film it becomes apparent that the cuts are concentrated (in percentage terms and numerically) in the second half of the story (see Table below). Following the Midpoint of the play (3.1) Juliet speaks 2785 words of dialogue, which equates to 65% of her entire role: Luhrmann reduces this to just 621 words in the film – a cut of 77%.

JULIET: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.3	1.5	2.1	2.4	2.5	3.2	3.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	5.3
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Norton)	57	149	894	357	58	902	833	400	89	455	106
<i>Romeo + Juliet</i> (1996)	34	96	514	117	0	171	260	82	0	77	31
<i>Percentage of dialogue cut</i>	40	35	42	67	100	81	69	80	100	83	71

In particular, her role is cut severely in two scenes in which she is relatively prominent in the play (3.2 and 3.5). The way scene 3.2 is cut is particularly instructive in terms of understanding what was thought unimportant in mainstream film terms. The scene arguably falls into seven phases:

- (1) Juliet waits for news of Romeo and verbalizes her thoughts, in soliloquy, on the subjects of Romeo and sex (3.2.1-31);
- (2) She learns of Tybalt's murder and Romeo's banishment (3.2.31-70);
- (3) She expresses her horror that the apparently beautiful outer body of Romeo hides a foul and murderous inner being (3.2.71-85);
- (4) She berates the Nurse (and then herself) for criticizing Romeo, saying that he is honourable (3.2.90-95);
- (5) She rationalizes the killing of Tybalt by arguing (to the Nurse) that her cousin would have killed Romeo (3.2.97-107);

(6) She explains that Romeo's banishment is worse than the death of her own family (3.2.107-126);

(7) She decides to kill herself, an act that is delayed by the Nurse's decision to find Romeo and brings him to Juliet (3.2.127-143).

Luhrmann reduces this complex mental and emotional process, which is expressed in 902 words of dialogue by Shakespeare, to just 171 words. He effects this by cutting most of the references to sex and virginity: for example the references to 'love-performing', 'leap to these arms', 'amorous rites', 'stainless maidenhoods' and 'hood my unmanned blood' are all deleted. These remove some of the complexity from her character, leaving only the 'famous' lines including 'cut him out in little stars' (3.2.20-31). The second phase of the scene (3.2.31-70) is deleted from the film and it must be assumed that someone informs her of the news. More significantly most of phase three (3.2.71-85) – when Juliet verbalizes the seeming contradiction between Romeo's outer and inner selves – contrasting 'fair', 'dove', 'lamb', 'divinest show', 'saint', 'honourable' and 'mortal paradise' with 'dragon', 'tyrant', 'fiend', 'raven', 'wolvish', 'despised', 'damned', 'villain', 'hell' and 'fiend' – is also cut, leaving just the essence of the thought in the lines: 'O God, did Romeo's hand shed Tybalt's blood? / O serpent heart hid with a flow'ring face! / Was ever book containing such vile matter / So fairly bound? O that deceit should dwell / In such a gorgeous palace!' ¹⁸⁶ Phase four (3.2.90-107) is largely omitted from the film and she expresses the essence again in the lines: Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband? / Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name / When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled

¹⁸⁶ Composite passage comprised of 3.2.71; 3.2.73; 3.2.83-85)

it? / ‘But wherefore, villain, didst thou kill my cousin?’¹⁸⁷ The final two phases of her dialogue are also deleted – namely, when Juliet thinks Romeo’s banishment is worse than the death of her family and decides to kill herself. These cuts enhance comprehensibility yet simultaneously strip away the complexity of Juliet’s emotional agonies. Luhrmann also keeps the story moving forward by intercutting scene 3.2 between the excerpts from scenes 3.1, 3.3 and 3.4 (see Table below)

Action	Time code (<i>Romeo+Juliet</i> , 1996)	Scene Reference
Juliet wants Romeo to arrive	01:04:19-01:05:05.	3.2.20-31
Romeo pursues Tybalt and then kills him	01:05:06 - 01:07:45	3.1.124-131
Prince banishes Romeo	01:07:46 - 01:09:27	Excerpts from 3.1.136-191
Romeo talks with Friar Lawrence and receives a message and a ring from Juliet via Nurse	(01:09:28 – 01:12:21)	Excerpts from 3.3.1-174
Juliet cannot believe Romeo killed Tybalt	01:12:22 – 01:12:45	3.2.71 3.2.73 3.2.83-85
Capulet’s Wife tells Paris that Juliet will not speak to him	01:12:46 – 01:13:16	Excerpts from 3.4.1-11
Juliet asks who can defend her husband if she doesn’t, but wonders why he killed Tybalt	01:13:17 – 01:15:07	3.2.97-100
Capulet tells Paris he can marry Juliet and instructs his wife to tell her	01:15:08 – 01:15:39	Excerpts from 3.4.12-35

Another key scene for Juliet (in the play) is 4.3 because it is the moment when she elects to take the potion and to cut herself off from her family; the scene falls into five phases:

- (1) Juliet dismisses her mother and the Nurse but then panics and calls the Nurse back – the Nurse does not hear (4.3.1-22);

¹⁸⁷ Retained by Luhrmann and taken from 3.2.97-100

- (2) She wonders whether she can trust the Friar's motives (4.3.23-28);
- (3) She worries about waking and then dying in the foul air of the tomb before Romeo can save her (4.3.29-34);
- (4) She imagines waking and seeing the spirits of dead Capulets and going mad (4.3.35-53);
- (5) In a moment reminiscent of the visions of Macbeth and Richard III, she thinks she sees Tybalt's ghost pursuing Romeo and drinks the potion (4.3.54-56).

It might reasonably be argued that this thought process follows a comprehensible path of determination intermittently punctured by fears and misgivings. However, her role here is cut by 83%, from 455 words to just 77. It can certainly be argued that the film retains the essence of what she is saying in this scene (e.g. saying goodbye, a minor two-line reflection on the potential efficacy of the potion and her concerns about having to be married if it does not work). However, of the five distinct phases of thought and emotion that Shakespeare created in 4.3, only parts of the first and second phase remain, plus the salutation: 'Romeo, I drink to thee'. These excisions shorten the dialogue and make it more comprehensible, but make Juliet's thought process much less complex and, somewhat ironically, less realistic than it is in the play.¹⁸⁸

Keeping the 'star' onscreen; excising poverty, morbidity and femininity

Lastly, looking at how Romeo's role changes on film what emerges is that he is only totally expunged from one of his thirteen scenes (2.5), see Table (below).

¹⁸⁸ It is not unprecedented for the 'potion' speech to be shortened. As Weis points out, the potion speech is the 'Everest of the play'. The soliloquy was also removed from Zeffirelli's 1968 film because it was a failure in his 1960 stage production. Weis ed., p. 81.

ROMEO: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.1	1.2	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.5	3.1	3.3	3.5	5.1	5.3
<i>R and J</i> (Norton)	502	193	254	213	694	192	341	96	252	530	197	563	659
<i>R+J</i> (1996)	233	17	135	125	271	141	78	0	147	188	80	215	138
<i>Percent of dialogue cut</i>	54	92	47	41	61	27	77	100	42	78	59	62	79

In addition, the level of cuts is relatively stable compared to the other characters.

This decision aligns with one of the fundamental rules of popular film, which is to keep the main star on-screen as much as possible. This issue is not problematical in the first half of the story because Romeo appears in all but two scenes until the end of 3.5, interacting with Benvolio, Mercutio, Friar Lawrence, Nurse, Tybalt or Juliet. However, following scene 3.5 Luhrmann faces a challenge because Romeo does not appear at all during Act 4 – a problem that will also face Julie Taymor with *Prospera* and both Zeffirelli and Almercyda with *Hamlet*. Luhrmann's solution was to cut 84% of Act 4. This decision means that Luhrmann's Romeo is only off-screen for just over seven minutes in the film – from 01:18:50 when he leaves Juliet to 01:26:14 when he is seen batting stones as the postman fails to deliver the message to him. By 01:28:53 Romeo is the focus of attention again as he meets Balthasar and hears about Juliet's 'death'. This requirement to keep the focus on the relationship between both main characters helps to explain why the marriage preparations and the consequences of Juliet's 'death' are cut – they take the focus away from the central story that Luhrmann wants to tell: Romeo and Juliet meeting, falling in love and then being reunited in the afterlife.

A slightly different factor is at play in relation to the cuts made in Act 5.

There is now a need to accelerate the story to its conclusion because the director

needs to reunite the lovers. This means that Romeo's role is cut from 563 words in 5.1 down to 215. The initial exchange with Balthazar remains in part because it contains important plot information and a degree of conflict between the messenger and the receiver of the news. The main cuts fall in the next phase where the necessary plot development is for Romeo to acquire poison: in reality it does not particularly matter how he acquires it, or from whom. As a result, the only words that remain from 5.1.34-57 are: 'Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night. / I will hence tonight.'¹⁸⁹ What is missing is the sense of penury that Shakespeare emphasizes.¹⁹⁰ Poverty is certainly mentioned in the retained dialogue but the overwhelming visual impression here is the moral degeneracy of the drug-dealer; therefore, there is no obvious sense that poverty is the motivating factor.¹⁹¹

In the final scene (5.3) Romeo's role is cut by 79% from 659 to 138 words and the reasons for this, it can be argued, are two-fold: one is to keep the focus on the main plot; second, is to avoid sympathy for Romeo's character being eroded. In the play Romeo arrives in a churchyard with Balthasar, before telling him to leave and threatening to kill him if he returns: 'By heaven, I will tear thee joint by joint, | And strew this hungry churchyard with thy limbs' (5.3.22-39). Romeo then kills Paris and drags his body into the tomb before laying it near to Tybalt's bloody corpse. All of these actions are cut along with many of the phrases that convey death and decomposition, such as: 'descend into this bed of death' (5.3.28), 'her dead finger' (5.3.30), 'Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death, | Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth, | Thus I

¹⁸⁹ Words underlined are original words that are repeated.

¹⁹⁰ Levenson ed., pp. 7-8.

¹⁹¹ The character that sells Romeo the poison can also be seen handing back guns to Romeo and Benvolio as they leave the pool hall scene towards the beginning of the film.

enforce thy rotten jaws to open, | And in despite I'll cram thee with more food' (5.3.45-48); 'Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?' (5.3.97); 'lean abhorred monster' (5.3.104); and 'worms that are thy chambermaids' (5.3.109). Not only are the verbal references cut, but there are also no visual analogues for death as a monster feasting on rotting flesh, shots of the blood-soaked corpses of Paris and Tybalt, or suggestions that Juliet's body will be a feasting-site for worms.

These cuts thus allow Luhrmann's Romeo, unsullied by murder, to enter a sanitized space, illuminated by neon and mock-Catholic iconography. Even then, just before he delivers his final lines, Luhrmann finds it necessary to delete any references to Romeo's earlier infractions, such as showing Tybalt's body wrapped in a blood-stained sheet along with words such as 'abhorred monster' and 'worms' that convey physical decay: thus allowing the focus to remain on a romantic spiritual afterlife.

One other notable thematic cut is the excision of references to Romeo's tendency to lose control of his emotions, with this being connected to effeminacy: 'Juliet / Thy beauty has made me effeminate' (3.1.109-10); 'Thy tears are womanish'; (3.3.109); 'Unseemly woman in a seeming man' (3.3.112); 'Digressing from the valour of a man' (3.3.126); and 'like a mishavèd and sullen wench' (3.3.142). All of these comments (and their actions) are cut in the film, along with Romeo throwing himself to the floor and weeping: 'then mightst thou tear thy hair, / And fall upon the ground, as I do now' (3.3.68-69). This decision makes Romeo seem more like a conventional hero than the more complex, somewhat feminised figure drawn by Shakespeare.

The lasting power of Shakespearean syuzhet arrangement

Looking at all of the above discussion in the round, two other features emerge that are of interpretative interest. The first is that the greatest degree of rearrangement of the original order of the scenes in *Romeo + Juliet* happens in the second half of the play – most markedly in Acts 3 and 5 (see Table below).

ORDER OF SCENES IN *ROMEO + JULIET* (1996)¹⁹²

0.0	1.1	0.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5
2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5					
3.1	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.5	
4.1	4.3	4.4							
5.1	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.1	5.2	5.3	1.1	5.3	

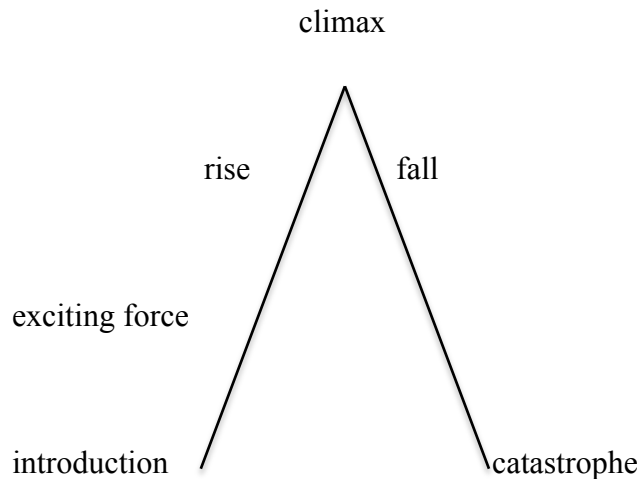
As noted earlier, scenes with Juliet are intercut with those of Romeo pursuing and killing Tybalt in Act 3; this functions to build suspense and dread as the audience watches Juliet's dreams of happiness evaporating in the fight and pursuit scenes. In Act 5 the same type of technique is used. Here scenes with Romeo returning to Verona are intercut with the Friar discovering the letter has not been delivered and the chief of police (the Prince) mobilising his forces to arrest Romeo. It is also clear that there is no major reorganisation of the syuzhet (with the exception of a brief exhortation from Captain Prince ('Hold, hold! Hold! / Once more, on pain of death, hold, hold!')) that is taken from scene one and inserted into the closing moments of the story. This supports Bordwell's observation that innovations in syuzhet are not encouraged in mainstream film and that the 'principal innovations occur at the level of the fabula – i.e. "new

¹⁹² The table reads from left to right.

stories””.¹⁹³ This is certainly true with this film, where the main focus of innovation is in the setting and characterisation.

Secondly, in Chapter One reference was made to the shape of tragic stories and to the idea of a climax at the midpoint (see illustration below).

FREYTAG’S PYRAMID



In terms of the mainstream film story model, it is clear that the first half of the story is driven by firm, concrete goals. Romeo wants to be loved and to get married; Juliet is under threat of forced marriage and wants to be happily married to Romeo. At the midpoint the two protagonists are pushed apart, and one (Romeo) is then off-stage for a lengthy period. In addition, the action moves away from the two main characters in the second half of the story to explore the effects of the events on the wider community – in this case the Capulet family. This is in marked contrast to the mainstream model that tends to stay with the central characters throughout and this tension helps to explain why Luhrmann made such extensive cuts to the second half of the play.

¹⁹³ Bordwell, pp. 157, 64.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* was the most commercially successful Shakespeare film (that used elements of the original text) in the past twenty-five years;¹⁹⁴ it is described by René Weis as 'arguably, the greatest Shakespeare film ever'.¹⁹⁵ In the last 19 years many hundreds of thousands of words have been written about the film and this chapter has been designed to add to that debate by highlighting some of the detailed changes that Luhrmann made to the structure. He retains those elements that enable easy comprehension – such as deadlines and explanations of actions – and cuts speech lengths from well in excess of 12-15 words to much more normative levels. This in itself tends to lend itself to shorter shot lengths and preferences actions and facial expressions over words. The analysis also reveals that he retains sizeable proportions of the roles for the characters that promote antagonism – in particular Mercutio and Tybalt who are active, self-directed and influential.

He also keeps a tight focus on the two main characters by ruthlessly excising thematic and dramatic elements from the second half of the play. These cuts deleted many of the domestic scenes based around the Capulet home, thus facilitating a focus on one or the other of the two main characters and the central love story. In addition, the textual cuts affecting Romeo and Juliet tend to focus on areas where the Shakespearean syuzhet brings together images of sexuality, death, and decomposing or bloody corpses along with the killing of Paris; in other words, the removal of images and associations that are atypical for a

¹⁹⁴ This includes several films made post-2010: *Coriolanus* (2012) – US\$0.75m; *Much Ado About Nothing* (2013) – US\$4.32m; and *Romeo and Juliet* (2013) – US\$1.15m.

¹⁹⁵ Weis ed., pp. 88,90.

mainstream love story. These cuts, particularly to Juliet's role, reduce the complexity of thought and emotion expressed by the character.

It has also been shown that many of the textual features cut by Luhrmann were those that had been specifically enlarged by Shakespeare. These include Capulet, Nurse and the servants in the Capulet household. What's more, the depiction of Capulet as an ageing patriarch is also significantly diluted in the film: Luhrmann's Capulet is little more than a middle-aged louche, whilst his drug-addled wife appears to have been enjoying an extra-marital liaison with Tybalt. This provides a link to the other plays analysed in this thesis, where the authority of Prospero and Claudius – both ageing males – is also challenged.

From a structural perspective, Luhrmann incorporates ten of the twelve basic elements noted by Levenson, retaining the fabula to some degree (the events linked by cause and effect). However, it is clearly a different story to the one that can be reconstructed by watching the Shakespeare play, due to the excision of the satellites. It has much less focus on the wider community and less tolerance for plots and characters that do not fit mainstream expectations. In other words, Luhrmann's boldness in relation to textual cutting makes the film more comprehensible from a mainstream perspective, but many of the subtle gradations in both thought and interaction are excised. These findings are, it is argued here, valuable when thinking about how the films influence reception of the plays with both students and a wider audience.

CHAPTER THREE

TEMPEST (2010)

Background

Looking at the issue of adapting Shakespeare's plays onto film through the filter of narrative theory, one concept that emerges when thinking of Julie Taymor is that of the implied author: there is a very pronounced sense of the visual creativity that informs her work. Lisa Starks describes her as 'an innovative choreographer, puppet- and mask-maker, set/costume designer, and director',¹⁹⁶ whilst Diana Henderson notes that she is 'perhaps most famous as the director of the unexpectedly creative and wildly successful Broadway musical *The Lion King*'.¹⁹⁷ Of course, prior to *Tempest*, Taymor had established her reputation for creativity with her ground-breaking version of *Titus* (1999). Thomas Cartelli, for example, writes that the film paints 'a spectacularly "virtual" version of the Eternal City' using 'postmodern iconography'.¹⁹⁸ Douglas Lanier thinks that the film 'reshaped Shakespeare's notoriously bloody Senecan tragedy into a disturbing commentary on cycles of violence and on the act of viewing violence as entertainment'.¹⁹⁹ Ramona Wray observes this artistic vision also at work in *Tempest*, writing that Taymor describes her approach as a 'heightened expressionism', which helps to create 'a Gothic vision of the continental

¹⁹⁶ Lisa Starks, 'Cinema of Cruelty' in Lisa S. Starks and Courtney Lehmann, *The Reel Shakespeare : Alternative Cinema and Theory*, (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press ; Cranbury, N.J. : Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 121.

¹⁹⁷ Diana Henderson in Anthony R. Guneratne, *Shakespeare and genre : from early modern inheritances to postmodern legacies*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 143.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe, *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 69.

¹⁹⁹ Douglas Lanier in John Russell Brown, *The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare*, (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 466.

Renaissance' in the film. However, Wray also notes that the film remains 'an inherently theatrical production, as is evidenced in the numerous masque-like elements and the aerial display managed by Prospera comprised of signs of the zodiac'.²⁰⁰ Russell Jackson, in making a comparison with Jarman's film of *The Tempest*, also observes her visual brilliance: 'Taymor's *Tempest* is full of elaborate special effects, beginning with a spectacular realisation of the storm'. He also notes that, in comparison to Jarman's version, 'more of the original text is heard throughout and the play's ordering of the action is followed more closely'. One the benefits of this adherence to structure is that by retaining 'Shakespeare's construction of the play's long second scene [this allowed] full scope for Helen Mirren's outstanding performance'.²⁰¹

However, the combination of Taymor's creativity and adherence to the original text also had its drawbacks according to some critics. Alan A Stone, whilst acknowledging the innovation of casting Helen Mirren as Prospera, also suggests that part of the problem with the film version is 'Taymor's art', writing that her film 'is a series of explosive images, not a narrative'. The other part of the problem, in Stone's opinion, is the original play makes it 'difficult to find the red thread of coherence that would guide an audience'.²⁰² Popular film critics voice similar views but compared the film unfavourably to her earlier film, *Titus* (1999). Philip French, in *The Guardian*, writes that: 'A decade ago, Julie Taymor made a well-acted, at times breathtakingly inventive film of *Titus Andronicus* that modulated from the ancient world into something like Mussolini's Rome.

²⁰⁰ Ramona Wray, 'Shakespeare on Film (1990-2010)' in Mark Thornton Burnett, Adrian Streete, and Ramona Wray, *The Edinburgh Companion to Shakespeare and the Arts*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 507.

²⁰¹ Russell Jackson, *Shakespeare and the English-Speaking Cinema*, First edition. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 61-63.

²⁰² < <http://bostonreview.net/alan-a-stone-julie-taymor-tempest> >

Her interpretation of *The Tempest* is less adventurous'.²⁰³ Richard Brody in *The New Yorker* writes that: 'You can't ruin "The Tempest" with Shakespeare, and Taymor gives us Shakespeare. Though the whole play isn't there, it's boiled down intelligently and generously, and she doesn't digress from the glorious poetry into much stage (or screen) business or parallel flourishes.' He concludes that she 'clearly reveres play and playwright—and her reverence stifles her creativity.'²⁰⁴

These approaches to the film seem to suggest that whilst Taymor is highly creative, and generally very successful, somehow her approach to *Titus* was different or superior to the one she applied to *Tempest*. This chapter now sets out to analyse her adaptation of *The Tempest* in this light and to ascertain whether it was, in fact, something in the play's structure that might have made this particular adaptation more challenging than *Titus* (see following page).

²⁰³ < <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/mar/06/the-tempest-helen-mirren-review> >

²⁰⁴ < <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/julie-taymors-the-tempest> >

The sources and elements of Shakespeare's story

In relation to the key elements of *The Tempest* story, it is productive to consider the possible origins of *The Tempest* story: what becomes obvious is that it has a significantly different pedigree to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. Whereas the earlier plays derived inspiration from previous works, *The Tempest* seems to have been based, in part, upon details extracted from accounts of overseas exploration and settlement – what some critics describe as ‘the extensive and varied discourses of colonialism’.²⁰⁵ Probably the best-known source for *The Tempest* is William Strachey's ‘True Repertory of the Wracke, and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates’ in July 1609. A doomed ship, the *Sea Venture*, had been separated from the main fleet en route to Virginia and wrecked off the coast of Bermuda.²⁰⁶

Virginia Mason Vaughan also speculates about the possible interactions between Shakespeare and his fellow players and other playwrights. She draws attention to Jonson's portrayal of Subtle in *The Alchemist*, which may have influenced the character of Prospero. Likewise Marston's *The Malcontent* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* feature ‘a deposed ruler from an Italian court’ that is a locus for the abuse of power. What is clear is that, as Vaughan points out, these narrative sources demonstrate ‘Renaissance Europe's fascination with exotic tales of magicians, wizards, strange beasts, enchanted islands and romantic love – a broad intertextual framework that underlies Shakespeare's play’.²⁰⁷ There are also echoes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with Sycorax ‘largely

²⁰⁵ Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan eds., *The Tempest*, Revised edn (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011), p. 39.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 42.

²⁰⁷ Ibid. pp. 55-6.

based on Ovid's account of Medea',²⁰⁸ Shakespeare in fact appears to re-use Medea's invocation to Hecate from Arthur Golding's English translation of Ovid: 'Ye airs and winds; ye elves of hills, of brooks, of woods alone' (cf.5.1.33f.).²⁰⁹ However, the main point to make here is that the borrowings are only partial and they are not structural. Looking at the type of source material reviewed above, it seems clear that whilst an agglomeration of influences may have been used, developed and structured by Shakespeare, there is no clear-cut prototype upon which *The Tempest* is based. In this light, it may be useful to now turn to the popular screenplay model to try and establish whether *The Tempest* has any of the features found in the mainstream film model.

The Tempest: the scale of the adaptation challenge

What is obvious from this initial assessment of the play is that, unlike *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, the story is not based on a conventional narrative source and, as such, there is no model with which to compare it. The next issue is to consider how Julie Taymor responds to this challenge when adapting the text of *The Tempest*. The first aspect to emerge is that, at 16,111 words, *The Tempest* is only two-thirds the length of *Romeo and Juliet*, suggesting that the level of cuts required to bring it in line with the normative 10,000-word screenplay is approximately 38%.²¹⁰ This is significantly less than both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, where the level of cuts required was approximately 58-67%. Having transcribed both the Norton text and the dialogue from *Tempest* (2010) into *Final Draft* format, what becomes clear is that Taymor's film actually has 9993 words,

²⁰⁸ Stephen Orgel ed., *The Tempest*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, Reissued 2008), p. 19.

²⁰⁹ Vaughan and Vaughan eds., p. 59.

²¹⁰ To generate the data for comparison between the Norton text and *Tempest* (2010) the dialogue was transcribed directly from the DVD version of the film into *Final Draft* and cross-checked with the sub-titles where the diction was unclear.

which is 38% shorter than the Norton text – this would at first sight make it comparable to the mainstream norm for a two-hour film.

However, this is not a fair comparison with a 120-minute film because *Tempest* (2010) is 98 minutes in duration. This differential can be offset by dividing the total words of dialogue by the running time (9993/98) to give words of dialogue per minute. This reveals that the characters in the film speak at a rate of 101 words per minute – somewhat more than the rate of 72 per minute for *Romeo + Juliet*, and an average of 83 words per minute of a prototypical two-hour film (10,000/120). What these basic statistics reveal is that Taymor cuts the text but does not reduce the dialogue to the levels that are normative in mainstream film. In terms of its reception, the upshot of this observation is merely that this film will appear relatively ‘wordy’ to a mainstream audience.

Looking next at the speech lengths of the various characters in the Norton text of *The Tempest*, it is clear that whilst there is a need to reduce the average length, the words per speech average for virtually all of the main characters in *The Tempest* falls in the low to mid-twenties. The main issues appear to be the speech lengths of Prospero (average of 38 words per speech) and Ferdinand (31 speeches at an average of 32 words per speech). Iris, as might be expected, is another potential issue (average 49 words) and Ceres (average 39 words).²¹¹ Whilst Taymor reduces the average speech lengths, Prospero (28 words), Caliban (21 words), Ferdinand (27 words), Trinculo (21 words) and the Boson (29 words) still have speech lengths that remain well above the mainstream average. This means that Taymor’s version of Prospero (Prospera), will still be speaking for nine to ten seconds per time on average: much too long for repeated dialogue

²¹¹ Ceres only speaks four times at an average of 39 words per speech.

in the popular cinema, which is normally around four seconds per speech. This finding suggests that although Taymor has, in numerical terms, less of a challenge than Luhrmann, she is rather more conservative.

What this data does not yet reveal is whether the cuts are executed equally across the entire play or are focused on particular Acts. When this process of statistical analysis is completed what becomes apparent is that, the level of cuts in the first three Acts is relatively low (just a third cut from each).

	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3	Act 4	Act 5	Epilogue	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	4586	3936	2862	1998	2602	127	16,111
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	2980	2719	1960	998	1336	0	9993
<i>Percentage cut</i>	35%	31%	32%	50%	49%	100%	38%

There are, again, larger cuts (in percentage terms) affecting the latter two acts more than the first three. However, whilst the level of cuts does escalate in Acts 4 and 5, Taymor cuts just 50% and 49%, whereas Luhrmann cut in the region of 80%. This finding slightly contradicts Virginia Mason Vaughan's observation that 'Taymor's most drastic cuts to Shakespeare's language occur in Act 5'. In fact, Act 4 is cut by a slightly greater relative percentage than Act 5, whilst Act 1 is cut more in absolute terms (by 1606 words as opposed to the 1266 words excised from Act 5).²¹² The next question is whether the cuts affect the order of the key events in the play (see Table).

²¹² In the film version Taymor does use the words from the Epilogue, but converts them into a non-diegetic song over the credits, sung by a professional singer. Due to its dislocation from Prospera the decision has been taken to exclude this from the word count.

Event	<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton) ²¹³	<i>Tempest</i> (2010)
(1.1.1--60) A storm sinks a ship full of noblemen	Pages 1-4 (of 96 pages) 1-4%	00:00:15 - 00:03:15 (of 01:38:00 running time) 3%
(Reported at 1.2.179-81) Prospero discovers that Alonso and Antonio's ship is nearby	Page 12 12%	00:10:20 10%
(1.2.444-445) Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love.	Page 24 25%	00:25:25 25%
Midpoint of <i>The Tempest</i>, (Norton) (2.2.177) Caliban thinks that he has found a new master who will grant him freedom.	Page 51 53%	00:44:00 45%
Midpoint of <i>Tempest</i>, (Taymor) (3.1.83) Miranda proposes marriage to Ferdinand	Page 55 57%	00:49:28 50%
(4.1.156-160) Prospero reflects on the insubstantial nature of life and power ('we are such stuff') after remembering Caliban's 'foul conspiracy'	Page 75 78%	01:17:52 80%
(5.1.120-209) Prospero regains his dukedom and Miranda will eventually succeed as Queen of Naples.	Page 85-90 88-94%	01:30:25-01:33:34 92-95%
(5.3.219-322) plus Epilogue The Milanese and Neapolitans plan to return home; Prospero frees Ariel; Prospero asks for the audience's mercy. (5.1.314).	Page 91-96 95-100%	01:34:00-01:38:00 96-100%

It is clear that all but one (the marriage proposal) remain in the same position and the same chronological order. What this means in practice is that, Taymor was relatively faithful to Shakespearean syuzhet, choosing not to change the order of the main events. As a result, most of the main events in the film fail to feature Prospero, as the main character, directly; only the moments when Prospera reveals that 'Our revels now are ended' and when she effectively reclaims the

²¹³ These page numbers refer to the way the transcribed Norton text is paginated in *Final Draft*.

Dukedom directly involve her. However, despite the innovative decision to cast a woman in the lead role and the inventive visual treatment, structurally it is fairly conservative. The scene order is identical with the play with the exception of scene 2.1 being split in two, with the first part placed before 2.2 and the second half following 3.1.²¹⁴

Changes in role lengths in *Tempest* (2010)

Given that Taymor makes moderate changes across the play as a whole, the next step is to assess whether more significant changes are made to particular characters and how that affects the story (see Table below).

	Prospero/a	Caliban	Stefano	Ariel	Gonzalo	Miranda	Ferdinand
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	29%	8%	8%	7%	7%	6%	6%
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	29%	11%	9%	8%	5%	7%	8%

What this Table shows very clearly is that there is one lead role with a number of fairly equal, but subsidiary, characters. This might suggest that the play could fit the popular film model well because it has a dominant central character. However, one of the factors that appears to be missing from *The Tempest* is a secondary role of sufficient size to allow a significant antagonist to develop. What is also evident from this Table is that the balance of roles is remarkably similar to the Norton text in percentage terms. This is not to say that no adjustments are made at all: Caliban's role increases slightly, as does Ferdinand's; on the other hand, Gonzalo and the Boatswain's roles are reduced, whilst Taymor removes the minor roles of Iris, Ceres, Juno, Adrian and

²¹⁴ This is true except for the fact that two lines (one from 1.1 and one from 5.1) are also placed elsewhere in the story; nevertheless, the main line of action is identical to the play, with the exception of the displacement of parts of 2.1 as discussed above.

Francisco. Nevertheless, minimal changes have been made to the overall balance of the characters.

Another way of identifying the detailed changes that Taymor makes is to consider how much individual roles were cut in total. Here it becomes apparent that although Taymor's text was 38% shorter than the Norton version, several roles vary considerably from this average:²¹⁵ Less severely cut than the average were (in ascending order) Trinculo (-8%), Ferdinand (-17%) and Caliban (-19%). Characters that are more severely cut than average were Sebastian (-45%), Gonzalo (-55%), the Boatswain (-75%) and Iris (-100%). What becomes apparent when the roles are looked at in this manner is that not only do the clown roles have relatively more prominence in the original play, but their roles are given greater weight in the film – as do the roles of Ferdinand and Miranda.²¹⁶ In the light of the above, the next step is to ask how these changes affect the various plotlines in the story.

Prospero: an unbalanced role that was further imbalanced

Looking closely at the way that the dialogue for Prospero is apportioned Act-by-Act in the play (see Table below), the first issue that becomes obvious is that 79% of Prospero's entire dialogue is spoken in two scenes (1.2 and 5.1). This means that the Prospero of the play has a fleeting presence in the middle of the play. This is problematic (from a mainstream film story perspective) on a number of levels. First, the virtual disappearance of the main character is a prompt for the

²¹⁵ It should be noted that several lines originally given to Adrian and Francisco are included in the text but given to other characters.

²¹⁶ In the bonus features on the DVD of *Tempest* (2010), Taymor makes specific reference to the Ferdinand/Miranda storyline as a version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

audience to relocate the locus of their emotional interest to another character's situation.²¹⁷

PROSPERO/PROSPERA: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.2	3.1	3.3	4.1	5.1	Epilogue	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	2358	61	107	707	1365	127	4725
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	1602	9	32	473	738	0	2854
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	35%	85%	70%	33%	46%	100%	39%

Second, in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* the midpoint of the story is significant: it is a point where something happens that spins the action in a new direction. What is noticeable here is that Prospero is not actively involved in the two different moments identified as midpoints in the play and film (either Caliban's bid for freedom at the end of 2.2 or Miranda's marriage proposal to Ferdinand in 3.1).²¹⁸ What is clear from the Table (above) is that Taymor's editorial strategy does not alter this situation and, if anything, exacerbates it: in *Tempest* (2010) 82% of Prospera's dialogue is taken from the equivalent of 1.2 and 5.1. This intensification of the structural imbalance of the role was created by Taymor's decision to cut 85% of Prospera's already minor appearance in 3.1 and 70% in 3.3. At the same time, Taymor chose to cut 1.2 and 5.1 less severely. The effect is that Prospera's fleeting appearances in the heart of the play are further diluted. In fact, following the end of scene 1.2 in the theatre (00:28:30 in the film), Prospera is only on screen for 36 seconds over the next 37 minutes (00:28:30-01:05:00).

²¹⁷ The data for the analysis is generated by creating a series of individual scene and character reports from the texts of *The Tempest* (Norton) and *Tempest* (2010) that have been transcribed into *Final Draft*. This methodology provides the means to see how much of the original role was cut by scene and by Act.

²¹⁸ Clearly Prospero/Prospera is observing Miranda's relationship with Ferdinand, but doesn't play an active role and the two lovers quickly fall in love and agree to marry.

A different issue affects scene 1.2: the problem of extended verbal exposition. This is a particularly acute issue in *The Tempest* where the level of preliminary exposition is much greater than can be found in most (if not all) of Shakespeare's plays or, indeed, those of his contemporaries. Lengthy verbal exposition is certainly unusual in mainstream narrative film and Taymor attempts to mitigate the problem by cutting the text and accompanying the voice-over with flashback as illustration. The text (the equivalent of 1.2.66-116) is reduced from 402 words to 218 words (roughly 50%), but it remains obvious on-screen narration. The technique slows the storytelling down and summarises the conflict verbally: the opposite of classical film narration.

From an interpretational perspective, there are textual changes that subtly change the nature of Antonio's offence compared to the play. In Taymor's revised version Prospera, in answer to Miranda's question 'But, are not you my mother?' replies (in invented dialogue) that she was the wife of the Duke of Milan and that on his death 'authority was conferred, as was his will, to me alone, thereby awakening the ambition of my brother and thy uncle, called Antonio'. As a result of these changes it is the conferring of authority upon a woman at the husband's death that awakes the ambition of Antonio: until then Antonio seems happy to play a supporting role. Prospera's background as a woman-magician then offers Antonio the opportunity to denounce her as a witch as she pursues her experiments and he reportedly portrays her as 'A practiser of the black arts! A demon, not a woman, nay, a witch! And he full knowing that others of my sex have burned for no less. The flames now fanned, my counsellors turned against me'. Finally, Antonio teams up with the King of Naples to usurp her.

The upshot of these changes is that Taymor offers a subtly different version of events. In *Tempest* (2010) Prospera does not appear to hand over complete responsibility as expressed in Shakespeare's 'The government I cast upon my brother, | And to my state grew stranger' (1.2.75-6); in contrast, the ambiguous wording of the screenplay suggests that Prospera possibly remains in charge and gives Antonio specific delimited duties: 'I did charge [Antonio] to execute express commands'. In addition, the suggestion seems to be that Antonio's ambition is awakened by the appointment of a woman rather than another man. As a result, the rewrite subtly changes the original problem from one of state governance into a sexism issue – Prospera was deposed because she was a woman and a magician, not because she was a flawed leader.

This, of course, is a perfectly reasonable re-interpretation of a story but the theme of sexism is not fully realised throughout the film: this opening dialogue is the only overt example of sexism. For example, Antonio does not give any verbal or visual indication that he regards Prospera as a witch when he meets her in the climactic scene (5.1). The reality is that Prospera basically acts out the same role as Prospero, which is a lost opportunity. For example, the descriptor 'master' for Prospera is retained on the grounds that 'mistress' doesn't hold the same power, but this seems to work against a more feminist reading of the character – is it not possible, through the actors' choices of behaviour, to imbue mistress (or empress) with the same respect as master?

The only time that the male/female dichotomy arises is when Prospera and Miranda are confronted by an aggressive (and obviously more physically powerful) Caliban; but Prospera's command of magical powers effectively neuters that threat in the same way that it does for Prospero as a older male

character facing a strong young male. Mason Vaughan does makes the observation that casting a woman enables Prospera to get physically close to Miranda in a way that would perhaps appear unsuitable for a man; this, however, is a far from revolutionary reading. The reality is that, apart from the magician/witch issue, the character is not changed in any significant way to highlight the specific challenges that a female magician faces that are not faced by a male counterpart.

Looking through the rest of Prospera's role, there are three other relatively significant changes. The first is the replacement of the masque-within-the-play scene featuring Iris, Ceres and Juno. This clearly makes sense on the grounds that the speeches are very long (between 39-49 words), which as discussed earlier, would be unsuitable for mainstream narrative film. In addition, the speeches are replete with classical references that are obscure to a popular audience. The second change is that Prospera does not offer Caliban a pardon and he walks off unreconciled and unrepentant – thus underlining the independence of the colonised in the face of colonial repression. The third major change is that Taymor opts to retain the Epilogue but converts it into a song, performed by a singer over the closing credits. This decision means that the film effectively ends with Prospera standing on top of a cliff and destroying her staff and the credits show her books sinking to the bottom of the ocean. This is a somewhat different interpretation to the play, where the focus is on the return to Naples rather than the abjuration of magic. This change is in keeping with an enhanced focus on Caliban and also on the relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda at the expense of the political plot.

In summary, the main plot events for Prospera are very similar to Prospero but, as can be seen, there is very little conflict implicit in these events (events that are cut or amended in the film are marked in bold):

1. Prospera discovers that Antonio and Alonso's ship is nearby (happens off-screen)
2. Prospera recounts how she was usurped in Milan 14 years earlier (1.2.36-187, shown in flashback)
3. Prospera gets a report on the shipwreck from Ariel (1.2.190-238, shown in flashback) and then deals with Ariel's temporary challenge to her authority (1.2.243-307)
4. Prospera orders Caliban to collect wood, is met with a hostile response and has to issue threats (1.2.316-378)
5. Prospera introduces Miranda to Ferdinand and she is pleased when they are seen to have 'changed eyes' (1.2.387-445)
6. Prospera decides to test Ferdinand's commitment and nullifies his brief challenge to her authority (1.2.446-506)
7. Prospera overhears Ferdinand and Miranda expressing their love for one another and their intention to marry and is content (3.1)
8. Prospera apologises for her harshness and blesses the marriage (4.1.1-138). **The masque of Iris, Juno and Ceres is cut in the film and replaced with an astrological display.**
9. Prospera remembers Caliban's plot and sends Ariel to fetch fancy clothes to distract the plotters (4.1.139-193)
10. Prospera is prompted to be merciful by Ariel before dispatching the spirit to collect the court characters (5.1.32)

11. Prospera casts one final spell and promises to abjure magic (5.1.33-57)
12. Prospera reveals herself to the court characters, forgiving them for their actions and drawing an apology from Alonso along with the return of her Dukedom (5.1.57-136)
13. Prospera suggests she has lost her daughter, **prompting Alonso to wish that Prospera's daughter and Ferdinand could be married and ruling in Naples**. Prospera then reunites Alonso with Ferdinand (5.1.137-201)
14. Prospera confronts Caliban, Trinculo and Stefano (**but does not grant Caliban a pardon**) (5.1.258-301)
15. Prospera dismisses everyone, Caliban leaves (**unrepentant**), Ariel is freed (**and she destroys her magic staff and books**) (5.1.302-322)

Looking through these events highlights another problem with the main character from a mainstream film perspective; there are no major choices that she is forced to make in either the original story or the film version. The main adjustments are the reaction of Caliban at the end of the story that leaves his status unresolved and the destruction of her magic staff is visualised. In other words, there are a number of events but little in the way of action, dramatic conflict or dilemmas to drive the story forward.

The role of Ariel as Prospera's ally, servant and surrogate

Given Prospera's highly imbalanced role, perhaps Ariel as an ally of Prospera's, might be able to act as her representative in the scenes from which she is missing.

However, as the Table below illustrates, Ariel only appears in two scenes that do not feature Prospera (2.1 and 3.2).

ARIEL: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.2	2.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	5.1	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	551	72	15	246	199	205	1288
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	407	43	15	138	67	119	789
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	26%	40%	0%	44%	66%	42%	39%

Ariel's fleeting presence thus reminds the audience of Prospera's plan but also reinforces the character's overwhelming power and influence. Ariel's support for Prospera is also both conditional and enforced. Beginning as a helper, Ariel organises and then reports back on the safe delivery of the court characters to the island. As the chart (above) makes clear, Taymor cuts just 26% of this fairly lengthy exposition but her choices do affect the interpretation of the story.

Taymor leaves in the details of the storm, again using flashback as illustration. However, she cuts one crucial piece of information: namely that the ship was part of a larger fleet bound for Milan and that these people (now in the Mediterranean) believe the King of Naples to be dead. This decision might seem to be relatively inconsequential but it diminishes the idea of a world beyond the island.

The central problem with Ariel, from a mainstream film perspective, is the lack of antagonism. Clearly the spirit wants freedom but, after an initial moment of resistance, Ariel falls into line following Prospera's stern rebuke and becomes 'more correspondent to command' (1.2.199). In fact, in 2.1 Ariel's role is then as a facilitator of plot events: awakening Gonzalo and preventing the murder of Alonso; instigating an argument between Trinculo and Stefano; confronting the courtiers with their crimes; pursuing and harassing the clowns

and Caliban. There is little in the way of self-directed action or character development. As a result, it not surprising that Julie Taymor uses imaginative visual images to enliven the proceedings and characterises Ariel as a naked, ethereal and de-sexed entity – a move that is visually arresting but does not change the reality that Ariel is largely a functional plot device and a way of characterising the obedient slave who is rewarded by a benevolent mistress.²¹⁹

The Lovers' importance increased

Given the problems already identified with the structure of *The Tempest* and the unbalanced role of Prospera, Taymor appears to have enhanced the roles of Ferdinand and Miranda, whose marriage becomes the means by which Prospera intends to regain and retain her power in Milan. As noted earlier Ferdinand's role is reduced by just 17%, whilst Miranda's role is cut by 33% (the roles taken together are cut by 24%). What this means in practice is that Ferdinand is promoted from having a smaller to a larger role than Miranda: a decision that appears somewhat confusing, given that Taymor casts a woman in the leading role. Putting that objection to one side, despite their slightly enhanced roles, the fundamental structural problem arises again: 77% of Ferdinand's role, and 94% of Miranda's, is confined to two scenes – 1.2 and 3.1. The Table (below) shows how marked this concentration is when the two roles are combined (in words of dialogue).

²¹⁹ Ben Whishaw, who played Ariel, never set foot in Hawaii and recorded his performance in a studio. The use of computers allowed Taymor to illustrate Ariel's earlier incarceration in a tree using flashback as illustration.

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.1²²⁰	1.2	3.1	4.1	5.1	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	0	953	749	144	133	1979
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	8	598	663	145	95	1509
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	0%	39%	11%	0%	29%	24%

Again, this concentration of the roles is a dynamic that Taymor leaves largely undisturbed: in the film 76% of Ferdinand's dialogue, and 92% of Miranda's, is taken from these two scenes and left in the same order as the Norton text. Nevertheless, Taymor does make adjustments to the balance of the scenes. Looking at scene 1.2, Miranda's role was cut by 48% and Ferdinand's by just 17% (see Table below).

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA: WORDS PER SCENE

1.2	Miranda	Ferdinand	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	620	333	953
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	321	277	598
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	48%	17%	37%

One significant change is the substantial emendation to Miranda's tirade against Caliban following his admission that he wishes he had managed to rape her when he had the chance. Her words in the Norton text might reasonably be described as racist and colonialist; in the film many of the more offensive terms are cut, leaving just the following words: 'Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness will not take, [...] I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak. (*The Tempest*, 1.2.354-65).

These excisions moderate Miranda's speech in several ways: in the play Caliban is told that, prior to his education, he 'wouldst gabble like a thing most brutish' and that he 'didst not, savage, know thine own meaning' and reference is

²²⁰ In the film Ferdinand speaks the words that Ariel reports in the play: 'Hell is empty And all the devils are here.'

made to his ‘vile race’. The assumption being that the world is meaningless unless expressed in the language of the colonizers and that he is tainted by birth. The cuts thus position the film’s Miranda in a rather more favourable light.

In the next main scene (3.1, where Miranda proposes marriage) the roles are only marginally cut, changing this into their largest scene (as opposed to 1.2, which is the largest scene in the play).

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA: WORDS PER SCENE

3.1	Miranda	Ferdinand	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	326	423	749
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	317	346	663
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	3%	18%	11%

This change in balance may well be as a result of the fact that Taymor interprets Ferdinand and Miranda as a version of *Romeo and Juliet*.²²¹ This would seem to be a somewhat partial reading of the roles given that unlike *Romeo and Juliet* the relationship is not initiated surreptitiously, the lovers are barely separated and it ends happily. However, there are similarities to the *Romeo and Juliet* story in the sense that the story involves such issues as a challenge to patriarchal (here matriarchal) norms, the feminisation of the male and challenges to the demarcation of feminine and masculine spheres of influence.²²² From an audience perspective these rebellions are not as challenging as *Romeo and Juliet*, I would argue, in the sense that Miranda and Ferdinand are pawns in Prospera’s dynastic game and are only faced with faux-disapproval from the matriarch – although they do not realise that this is the case.

²²¹ In the DVD special features, Taymor suggests that *The Tempest* ‘combines *Romeo and Juliet* with *Richard III*, with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It is his revenge stories, his comedies, his love stories all rolled into one. It’s kinda the perfect Shakespeare’.

²²² Sasha Roberts, *William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*, (Plymouth: Northcote House for the British Council, 1998), pp. 34-69.

In scene 4.1, the effective climax of Ferdinand and Miranda's story, Prospera approves their marriage. In the play Miranda only has twelve words and these are retained by Taymor (with the replacement of 'his' with 'her'): 'Never till this day | Saw I HER so distempered' (4.1.144-5). Ferdinand has a much larger part in this scene and, in numerical terms, his role increases by a single word (see Table below). However, this is not because Taymor preserves the original dialogue. In fact, she cuts a great deal of his dialogue and replaces it with a song.

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA: WORDS PER SCENE

4.1	Miranda	Ferdinand	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	12	132	144
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	12	133	145
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	0%	0%	0%

Some of these cuts are logical in terms of making the story comprehensible; for example deleting obscure classical references and slightly problematic syntax. However, one cut changes the way Ferdinand might be perceived. In the play, Ferdinand denies thinking of 'the murkiest den, / The most opportune place' as a possible location to deflower Miranda. It is perfectly conceivable within the mainstream model for Taymor to visualise this idea (as a flash-forward) to suggest to the viewer that he might be thinking of this. In contrast, Ferdinand launches into one of Feste's mournful post-midnight songs from *Twelfth Night*: 'O mistress mine, where are you roaming?' (*Twelfth Night*, 2.3.35-48).²²³ This song is a somewhat incongruous choice given that Miranda appears to be in no danger of roaming anywhere. In fact she couldn't be more compliant or committed to the societal tradition of marriage and the continuation of the

²²³ The inclusion of this song is the reason that Ferdinand speaks one word more in the film than he does in the play

Milanese dynastic enterprise: in other words, the omission of this sexual reference and the inclusion of an inappropriate song make the characters even more bland than they already are.

The final development is the Resolution, which comes via a brief appearance in 5.1, when Ferdinand is reunited with his father and Miranda gets her first view of the ‘brave new world | That has such people in’t!’ (5.1.186). Taymor’s cuts here illustrate the greater importance she seems to place upon the relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda as opposed to the reunion of son and father. As a result, Ferdinand’s role in this final scene is cut by 43% (see Table below).

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA: WORDS PER SCENE

5.1	Miranda	Ferdinand	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	44	89	133
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	44	51	95
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	0%	43%	28%

One aspect of Miranda’s brief dialogue in the final scene is her praise of people on the basis of their appearance; this must give rise to some doubts about her naïvety and fitness to rule. It is also notable that Taymor does not take the visual opportunity to focus on Antonio at this point, which might at least prompt the audience to reflect on Ferdinand and Miranda’s capabilities as leaders and to what degree they will be able to deal with the latent threat from Antonio.

In summary, despite the elevation of the lovers’ relative importance in the screenplay, the main problem still persists that they only feature prominently in two scenes and there is very little true antagonism: either between them as a couple or with Prospera. Admittedly Ferdinand does try and flex his muscles in a brief challenge to Prospera’s authority (with the words ‘No. | I will resist such

entertainment till | Mine enemy has more power.' (1.2.468-70), but (like Ariel) his momentary aggression is immediately overcome by Prospera's magic. Miranda does disobey her mother by telling Ferdinand her name and helping him, but this is hardly the stuff of major drama. Against this background the progression of their story as follows (events that are cut or amended in the film are marked in bold):

1. Miranda and Ferdinand meet 1.2 and instantly fall in love (1.2.413-453)
2. Prospera tests Ferdinand's resolve with a menial task (1.2.453-3.1.31)
3. Ferdinand's task is not overly onerous and Miranda volunteers to help him; they sit and talk before committing themselves to each other in marriage; Prospera overhears the conversation and is content (3.1.31-97)
4. Ferdinand and Miranda's union is formally blessed by Prospera (4.1.1-163)
5. **Alonso wishes that Ferdinand and Miranda were both alive to rule in Naples** (5.1.151-2) and then they are revealed to him, leading to his approval of the union (5.1).

It is abundantly clear that this storyline, when viewed from a mainstream film perspective, is likely to be regarded as unsatisfactory. Very little happens, the characters get what they want without much opposition and they appear to mean exactly what they say: there is no subtext. These problems are exacerbated by the way the role of Miranda is edited to remove racial slurs and any idea that European language and beliefs are inherently superior to native culture. In addition, Taymor cuts a section of Alonso's speech that specifically expresses his

desire for Ferdinand and Miranda to be alive and ruling in Naples. Thus the film version of Ferdinand and Miranda's story is merely one of a saccharine love plot rather than one bound to the idea of political succession.

The reduced tension between existing power structures and the new world

Looking at the changes analysed so far, what is clear is that the overall structure of the play is, in comparison with the mainstream film model, imbalanced. The main character – and the supporting characters analysed so far – all have roles concentrated in relatively few scenes. There is very little in the way of sustained antagonism and little subtext. It is also apparent that Taymor does relatively little to change this state of affairs, with the main changes at the level of the characterisation and setting – the casting of a woman in the lead role, the island location, and theatrical production design (the paraphernalia of experimentation in Prospera's cell). There is little sense of connection with a political world outside the island, or of the story's ultimate relevance to the audience.

There are, of course, several other storylines but what becomes apparent is that the same characteristics already observed are prevalent in the other plotlines. As a result the plan here is to summarise the changes rather than do a scene-by-scene breakdown.

Looking briefly at the court characters plotline – Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio and Sebastian – it is clear that it has very similar characteristics. 61% of their joint dialogue falls into just one scene (2.1).²²⁴ Again, what becomes clear (see Table below) is that the cuts that Taymor made exacerbated the problem

²²⁴ On a macro level two of the minor courtiers (Adrian and Francisco) were completely deleted by Taymor, with two fragments of Adrian's 67-word dialogue subsumed into Gonzalo's role: 'Though this island seem to be desert' and 'The air breathes upon us here most sweetly' (2.1.35 and 2.1.46).

rather than alleviating it; she cut scene 2.1 by just 34%, meaning that 70% of the dialogue in the plotline comes from this one scene.

THE COURT CHARACTERS: WORDS PER SCENE

	1.1	2.1	3.3	5.1	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	230	2195	552	620	3597
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	51	1441	280	274	2046
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	78%	34%	49%	56%	43%

To summarise the main changes, Taymor plays down the challenge to the established Italian civil order implicit in the opening scene of the play (1.1) by deleting 78% of the dialogue. In particular Gonzalo is downgraded from 152 words to just 10 along with the Boatswain's challenge to his superiors ('What cares these roarers for the name of king?'). This deleted dialogue predicts the restitution of the normative political order at the end of the story – a theme that, as has already been seen, is downplayed by Taymor in the Ferdinand and Miranda plot. These cuts may appear fairly irrelevant but they subtly omit the key point that the powerful are now virtually powerless in this new setting: a lower class sailor feels emboldened enough to challenge the authority of a monarch.

Scene 2.1 falls into three sections. The first section (2.1.1-181) sees the characters failing to adapt cohesively to their new environment. One of the aspects that is not cut in this scene is Sebastian's racist comment when addressing Alonso about the loss of Ferdinand: 'Sir, you may blame yourself for this great loss, / That would not bless our Europe with your daughter, / But rather loose her to an African' (2.1.123-5). This exchange is kept in the film in contrast with the choice to cut Miranda's racism (noted above). In addition, a passage that discusses the damage that Alonso's fateful journey has inflicted on the many

widows it has created in Milan is cut (2.1 128-34). These two choices have the effect of playing up the racism of the white males, whilst downplaying the political storyline.

Another political and philosophical passage that is substantially cut is Gonzalo's reflection upon the ideal society, based in part upon Montaigne's essay 'Of the Cannibales', beginning with the lines 'I'th' commonwealth I would by contraries / Execute all things. For no kind of traffic / Would I admit, no name of magistrate'; (2.1.147ff.).²²⁵ Gonzalo goes on to remark that there would be no treason, theft or use of weapons – a criticism that might be directly applicable to the usurping Antonio. Most of this contextual material has been cut, simplifying the exchanges to make Gonzalo merely a hopeless idealist facing off against a couple of mocking realists. This is not to argue for a complete restitution of the missing text, but to suggest that Taymor's choice again plays down the political angle.

In the second phase (2.1.182-292) the plot picks up some sense of direction as Antonio plans regicide. This, in plot terms, would be a promising development were it not for the fact that Ariel arrives as a *deus ex machina* to rescue Alonso and Gonzalo from certain death. In other words, whilst this scene exposes the truth about Antonio's motivations and character (and shows Sebastian to be reluctant but persuadable), the rescue is not a satisfying way to resolve the threat of murder (for a film story): because neither Alonso nor Gonzalo play an active part in their own survival.

The presence of the court characters tails off in their final two scenes, but Taymor exacerbates this brevity by cutting Antonio and Sebastian to just 29

²²⁵ Michel de Montaigne and M. A. Screech, *The Complete Essays*, (London: Penguin, 2003).

words each. What is of most interest here is that, in the original text, Sebastian dismisses Antonio's further urgings to attempt regicide, with a curt 'I say tonight, no more'. A few moments later Antonio's fears about Sebastian's character are confirmed when he is distracted by the 'drollery' of the spirits and then is the first to succumb to the temptation of food with the words 'No matter since. / They have left their viands behind, for we have stomachs. / Will't please you taste of what is here?' These words demonstrate Sebastian's slothful character and so it makes little sense for Taymor to have given these lines to Antonio, as she did.²²⁶

This scene is then dominated by the character of Ariel who, disguised as a harpy, rebukes Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian for their past sins. This prompts dissimilar reactions: in the play Alonso realizes that he has done wrong and on hearing Ariel's threat that he must suffer 'Ling'ring perdition' (3.3.77) threatens to commit suicide (3.3.101-2); in contrast the film fails to visually express any sense that Alonso is actively seeking suicide whilst Sebastian and Antonio are rendered ridiculous wandering around in long shot, waving their swords like children in a school play.

In the final scene (5.1) the natural order is beginning to be restored and what is immediately noticeable is that, in the Norton text, the two antagonists (Antonio and Sebastian) are virtually silent whilst Alonso and Gonzalo are more prominent. Taymor changes the ending by cutting an important part of Alonso's speech (5.1.150-4), which is his wish that Ferdinand and Miranda were alive: 'O heavens, that they were living both in Naples, / The king and queen there!'. This

²²⁶ The problem of differentiation between Antonio and Sebastian is magnified further by Taymor's decision to dress them similarly in the film version. As a direct point of comparison, in Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* not only are Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio and Tybalt all instantly recognizable as individuals, so are minor characters such as Samson and Gregory.

change again downplays the political aspect of the story and, in the film, the dynastic succession is sacrificed in favour of just regaining the dukedom and Miranda and Ferdinand merely marrying. A further result of this reduction in the importance of the political theme is that Taymor decides not to visualise Antonio's festering resentment, which is a feature of the play – not unlike the feeling of irresolution generated by the reactions of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*, Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing* or Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. The clear message from the play (in the form of Antonio's virtual silence) is that he does not wish Ferdinand and Miranda joy, that he remains unreconciled to Prospero and that he is a potential threat to political stability in the future. In fact Taymor undermines the sense of distance by giving Antonio two of Alonso's lines addressing Trinculo: 'And Trinculo is reeling ripe. / How camest thou in this pickle?' This is a slightly surprising choice, given that Trinculo is Alonso's jester and not particularly connected to Antonio. The effect, although he only speaks an additional 11 words, is to undermine the sense that Antonio is now the outsider: it gives him an unwarranted connection with the group and undermines the sense of isolation.

In summary, looking at the plot development for these characters it is clear that, as with Ferdinand and Miranda, very little of great import actually happens (text marked in bold relates to events that were deleted in the film):

1. In a storm the court characters, **in particular the King**, find their authority challenged and of little use; they are shipwrecked (1.1)
2. They are washed up on shore but Alonso's son, Ferdinand, is believed drowned. Sebastian blames the loss of Ferdinand on Alonso, **in particular his refusal to listen to good advice about the marriage**

of Clairibel. Gonzalo is mocked for his Golden Age dreams. When Alonso and Gonzalo fall asleep, Antonio incites Sebastian to kill his brother. The plot is foiled by Ariel (2.1)

3. Antonio tries to maintain Sebastian's focus on murder until Ariel confronts them with their sins, leading Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian to run mad (3.3)
4. Prospera confronts them. Alonso admits his guilt, surrenders Milan and asks for forgiveness.
5. **Alonso wishes that Ferdinand and Miranda were both alive to rule in Naples (5.1.151-2).**
6. **Gonzalo comments on the way the gods have mysteriously influenced events and asks them to bless the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. He comments on how the usurpation has not only returned Prospera to power but has also created a stronger dynastic alliance between Milan and Naples (5.1.203-216).**
7. Alonso is reunited with his son and is delighted that Ferdinand has found a wife. Sebastian returns to his subordinate role, whilst Antonio is largely silent.

In film terms there is little that can be converted to compelling actions and the goals of the characters are not particularly ambitious or testing: Alonso wants to be reunited with his son, but does not make an enormous effort to make this happen; Antonio and Sebastian want to kill Alonso but it is not clear what would happen next if they succeeded; and Gonzalo has no tangible goal other than to

dream of an alternative society and reassure Alonso. In other words, this plot line lacks the qualities of a mainstream film story.

Caliban and his confederates²²⁷

The final plotline groups together Caliban and his confederates, the clowns Stefano and Trinculo. This group is considered together on the basis that, following Caliban's initial exchange with Prospera in 1.2, these characters are never apart and conduct their plan cooperatively.

	1.2	2.2	3.2	4.1	5.1	Total
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	229	1530	1125	453	140	3477
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	214	1235	875	309	110	2743
<i>Percentage Cut</i>	7%	19%	22%	32%	22%	21%

The first aspect to note (see Table above) is that, in common with the other groups analysed thus far, their roles are also concentrated in two scenes: 2.2 and 3.2. These two scenes account for 76% of their roles in the Norton text and 77% in the Taymor adaptation. Similarly, their presence in the story then plunges precipitously, particular in scene 5.1, which as illustrated earlier, is dominated by Prospero/Prospera. The difference between this plotline and those involving Ferdinand and Miranda and the Court Characters is that this is the least heavily cut in the film and – as a result – becomes the largest subplot (see Table below).

	Ferdinand and Miranda	The Court Characters	Caliban and Confederates
<i>The Tempest</i> (Norton)	1979	3597	3477
<i>Tempest</i> (2010)	1490	2046	2743
<i>Percentage Reduction</i>	-25%	-43%	-21%

Taymor cuts the 3477 words given to Caliban and his confederates in the Norton text by just 21%, in comparison to the 43% cut for the Court Characters. The

²²⁷ This group descriptor is inspired by Prospero's own words: 'Caliban and his confederates' (4.1.140)

question is, does the plotline justify the priority that Taymor affords it and why might it be cut to a lesser degree?

Looking at the first scene (1.2), the most obvious characteristic is that Caliban's role (he is the only one of the group in this scene) is cut by just 7% from 229 to 214 words. The reason for this becomes apparent because this is the scene where Caliban stakes his claim as Prospera's clearest antagonist; in the first four exchanges he refuses to do as he is ordered, prioritises his own needs, curses Prospera and Miranda, and finally accuses them of stealing his inheritance (1.2.317f). Despite his overt hostility, Caliban's character is also complex as this dialogue demonstrates; he freely acknowledges that Prospera and Miranda initially treated him well, had taught him to speak their language and that, as a result, he had once loved them. All of this text is retained in the film.

Bordwell's comments on the primacy effect are instructive here: this speech gives a nuanced and empathetic view of Caliban. He showed charity towards Prospera and Miranda by helping them to survive when they first arrived on the island. In fact, they continue to rely upon him as expressed in Prospera's remark that 'We cannot miss him. He does make our fire, / Fetches in our wood, and serves in offices / that profit us' (1.2.314-6). In other words, the first impression of Caliban is not entirely negative. In addition it is not entirely fanciful to suggest that the term 'offices that profit us' extends to fire making, and hunting. Later in the story (2.2.159f) it becomes clear that he can find a range of food sources, including berries, fish, crabs, jay's eggs, marmosets, filberts and seagulls.

The second quality Caliban possesses is the potential for love; at least he makes such a claim for himself without being contradicted: 'and then I loved

thee / And show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle'. This complicates the reception of Caliban because if he is 'got by the devil himself' (1.2.322) how is he capable of love? Another interpretation is that Prospera has taught Caliban how to love; if this is the case then he can be nurtured, which runs counter to the argument put forward later in the story by Prospera that he is 'A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nuture can never stick' (4.1.188-89). A third option is that Caliban mistakes idolisation for love and a fourth option is that he is lying. Whichever of these interpretations is accepted, Caliban's remarks are not contested until Prospera belatedly calls him a 'most lying slave' (1.2.347). But what is she referring to here? Is everything he just said a lie, or just his suggestion that Prospera is unjust in imprisoning him for attempted rape? The key factor is that he is a complex character, worthy of our respect.

Taymor's interpretation, however, focuses on portraying Caliban as a colonised black slave, placing him in a cleft in the rocks, surrounded by bottles and detritus: this conveys the idea of Caliban living in squalor rather than exploiting any inherent potential as an independent, skilful being. His skin, in a nod towards his textual description as a 'moon calf', is variegated with pale patches and inscribed with insulting words drawn from his colonisers' vocabulary.²²⁸ these include the words puttock, fensucked, hell, hate, cockered, and boarpig.²²⁹ The predominant impression is one of racial oppression based on skin colour. This may be critiqued as a fairly conservative reading, given that a

²²⁸ The presence of writing on the character's body is potentially interesting for the actor and cast, but of little use to the audience because they are virtually indecipherable when watching. This detail is discussed in the Special Features on the *Tempest* DVD. A comparison might be drawn with Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* where textual references are more clearly integrated into the background setting that the characters inhabit.

²²⁹ These words are taken from other plays: 'Puttock' can be found in *Cymbeline* (1.1.141), *Henry VI Part 2* (3.2.191) and *Troilus and Cressida* (5.1.32); 'Fen-suck'd' can be found in *King Lear* (2.4.139); 'Boar pig' can be found in *Henry IV Part 2* (2.4.97); 'hell' and 'hate' are found in many plays and 'cockered' appears to have been invented by Taymor.

post-colonial interpretation of the story has now become the theatrical norm. Nevertheless, the fact that Taymor chooses this route does highlight the continuing racial tensions that give this reading relevance to a wider audience. One other thing to note from this initial confrontation is that whilst Taymor chose to preserve the exchange of dialogue almost entirely as it appears in the play, she does make one minor edit: moderating Prospera's harshness slightly by eliminating the phrase 'filth as thou art'.

If the opening scene describes Caliban's normal life, a potential change happens when he meets the two clowns, Trinculo and Stefano in 2.2. The dialogue in this scene, which introduces a mirror plot featuring the lower class clowns aspiring to power, is cut by just 19% - from 1530 words to 1235 but the reasons for this leniency are difficult to fathom. Caliban's main objective as the scene begins is to prepare himself for being tormented by Prospera's spirits. Yet the camera angles do nothing to build up suspense and the action plays out on a lava-covered landscape that acts like a large theatre set, rather than a film location. There is little sense of Caliban's apprehension at the arrival of Trinculo, or the latter's concern at the idea of climbing under the gaberdine with Caliban, or Stefano's confusion about a four-legged creature that is hiding from him. This lack of choice regarding whose point of view the scene is being played from makes the scene flat, literal and devoid of humour. By the end of the scene Caliban decides that Stefano is the means by which he will free himself of Prospero's tyranny. This is a scene that remains stubbornly theatrical because of the amount of dialogue used and Taymor's decision not to tell the story of the scene from a particular character's perspective. As a result, very few questions are promoted in a viewer's mind – the point that Bordwell makes is that narrative

film exists on the strength of the hypotheses that viewers develop as a result of viewing the film. Here the audience is not required to ask ‘what happens next’ because the information is provided.

Moving on to the second of Caliban, Trinculo and Stefano’s main scenes (3.2), by the opening all three of them are drunk and Trinculo seems to have been told about the existence of Prospera and Miranda: ‘They say there’s but five upon this isle’ (3.2.4-5). Again, the dialogue is not cut particularly severely (only 22% in total, from 1125 words down to 875). The focus in this scene is Caliban’s attempt to persuade Stefano to kill Prospera. Again the issue here is too much dialogue and no clear decision about whose perspective to film the scene from. The key moment in the scene when Caliban reveals that his plan is the murder of Prospera (3.2.58-9) in the afternoon whilst she is asleep. Thus the piece of information that provokes Stefano to action is not so much the possibility of power but the lure of lust; when Caliban reveals that Prospera has a daughter that ‘will become thy bed’ (3.2.99) Stefano immediately sobers up.

Once Stefano is persuaded to murder Prospera, all that remains is for Caliban to ensure that Stefano carries through on his promise. This plan is immediately thrown off track when Stefano is distracted and frightened by Ariel’s mysterious music (foreshadowing the problems that Caliban will face in their next scene where Stefano and Trinculo are distracted by clothes). Caliban reassures them with what is commonly regarded as one of the most beautiful speeches in Shakespeare: ‘Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.’ This speech is retained in full by Taymor but lacks impact in the film version because of the plenitude of film discussed in Chapter One. The eye is constantly drawn to the details of the

setting instead of the mind being freer – as it is in the theatre – to concentrate on the beauty of the words. Harsh as this might be, cutting this speech may be more effective.

In the penultimate scene (4.1) a rather bizarre twist occurs when Caliban, who has ostensibly been driving the plotline, has his role cut by 54%. In comparison, Stefano's role is cut by 38% and Trinculo's role actually increases by 13%. In the theatre there is a greater focus on Caliban's anxiety: he needs to get Stefano to commit the murder before Prospera wakes. In the film the focus is on the clowns' self-delusion, reducing any suspense that there might be and turning it into a knockabout. This is not to argue that Shakespeare wrote a particularly fabulous scene that Taymor has somehow ruined but to observe that there is little or no suspense in her version.

The final scene (5.1), as might now be expected from the pattern of the previous subplots, sees minimal contributions from Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo and these are cut by 25%, 31% and 7% respectively. The effect of this scene is mainly a resolution of the clowns' subplot as they are brought back under the protective wing of their master Alonso and return to their previous roles in life. In the final exchanges the first two of Caliban's speeches are left as they are in the play, where he stands amazed by the visual glory of Prospera and the foreign nobles before fearing retribution, beginning 'O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed! / How fine my master is! I am afraid' (5.1.264-5). However, the final exchange between Prospera and Caliban is changed. In the stage version a connection is made between Caliban's deformed appearance and his deformed personality before offering him the possibility of a pardon if he is obedient; in the film this dialogue is completely excised along with Caliban's reply to the

effect that he will amend his ways. In part this places Prospera in a somewhat more favourable light than her male avatar Prospero: she is less judgemental of external appearance; it also has the effect of making Caliban less compliant with the governing class.

Yet the cuts lead to confusion concerning Caliban's ultimate fate. A few moments earlier Prospera declares that 'this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine' (5.1.278-9) but her final exchange works against this idea in the film. After saying that 'every third thought shall be my grave' (5.1.314) she turns to an aggressively postured Caliban and they stare at each other in silence for just over thirty seconds (1:36:18-01:36:55) before Caliban walks off. The implication seems to be that the tension between the two is unresolved: she is not taking responsibility for him and he is not seeking for grace. The most logical coda to this event (for a popular film) would be to see Caliban heading out to reclaim his island: reinforcing the idea that colonialism has failed to cow him into submission. An alternative would be to see him trailing after Prospera onto the ship bound for Milan and Naples. What happens is that the situation is left unresolved. This problem is made more obvious by the fact that the political angle has been downplayed: there are no ships awaiting them and little sense of a return to Milan. Of course there is no particular reason why there should be a closed ending, albeit a mainstream audience tends to want a clear resolution of the plot lines. However, Orgel notes this tension between open and closed endings in Shakespeare plays and argues that 'all interpretations are essentially arbitrary, and Shakespeare texts are by nature open, offering the director or critic only a range of possibilities'.²³⁰

²³⁰ Orgel ed., p. 12.

CONCLUSION

Looking from a variety of angles at both *The Tempest* and its film version *Tempest* (2010), it is evident that the structure of the original play and Taymor's film show considerable variances from the mainstream narrative film model. The upshot of this is that the story becomes less easily accessible on film – at least to audiences that use the mainstream model as a starting point for story comprehension. In the first place, because the original story was constructed from a number of contemporary sources it is not based on an existing dramatic narrative source. It does not have a central character who is constantly on-screen and there is not a consistently powerful source of antagonism driving the main character(s) to make choices – unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, where the familial feud binds together the various subplots or *Hamlet* where the central revenge plot coheres the action. In *The Tempest* the power of Prospero is so superior that the character is never effectively threatened in a physical sense. One objection here might be that Prospera is put under emotional or mental pressure – however, whilst this is true, it is also more difficult to portray complex mental states in film over a long period.

There are also a number of structural differences. The need to recount the events of twelve years ago in Milan slows down the action during an extended period of exposition; Miranda and Ferdinand meeting and falling in love lacks suspense; the political angle is negligible, thus reducing any impact of the events on a wider world. Looking at the detailed breakdown of the characters further differences emerge: 79% of Prospero's role is contained in just two scenes (1.2 and 5.1). This results in a great deal of the narrative drive in the middle of the story being taken up by subplots. As has been illustrated in some detail (above),

each of these subplots is also essentially contained within two scenes with very little conflict occurring and very few clear plans for the characters. In each plot the action tends to peter out, ending in a final scene of partial reconciliation, dominated by Prospero. In addition, the two characteristics that narrative theorists have identified as driving a story forward – suspense and curiosity – are in short supply. Suspense is lacking because, as has been observed, Prospero carefully choreographs the plot. There is also little sense of curiosity because there is virtually no back-story provided for most of the characters (with the exception of sketched detail about Prospero, Miranda and Caliban – and this tends to be offered in the form of initial, concentrated exposition).

Taymor does not significantly alter these dynamics. She makes relatively modest cuts to the text (in comparison to Luhrmann, Zeffirelli and Almereyda) and leaves the plot events – apart from a degree of intercutting adjacent scenes – in largely the same chronological order as the play (see Table below).

ORDER OF SCENES IN TEMPEST (2010)²³¹

1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2		
2.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.2
3.1	2.1	3.2	3.3		
4.1					
5.1	4.1	5.1			

This conservatism may seem to confirm the critical views that Taymor is far more adventurous in her treatment of *Titus* (1999). After all, in that film she introduces a young child in a modern setting, playing with his toy soldiers, despoiling a kitchen, and then being carried into a stylised Roman amphitheatre. She also introduces the idea of Penny Arcade Nightmares that punctuate the action.

²³¹ The table reads from left to right.

However, I argue that in reality Taymor's approach to *Tempest* is not significantly different to *Titus*. She makes a number of changes to the content. She re-genders Prospera and removes some of her more racist judgements of Caliban. She chooses to cut the Courtiers' plot more severely than the other two supporting plot lines; thus elevating the importance of Caliban and his confederates and of Ferdinand and Miranda's love story. The separation of the love story from the idea of a reinstatement of dynastic rule in Milan and Naples also changes the story overall. As demonstrated above, the Caliban and confederates story becomes the largest of the subplots. She also chooses to leave Caliban's story more unresolved than the play, with his ultimate fate unclear – illuminating the continuing irresolution of inter-racial tensions. Lastly, as Stephen Orgel points out, the original text is notable for its 'ambivalence and ambiguities' resulting in attempts to 'fill in its blanks, to create a history that will account for its action, and most of all, for its hero'.²³² If anything, Taymor's interpretation adds to those ambiguities and makes the story rather more open-ended than the original.

In summary, I argue that, contrary to the view taken by some critics noted earlier in this chapter, the major difference between *Titus* and *Tempest* is not a collapse in Taymor's creativity but a result of the degree to which she adheres to the original structure of both plays. However, in *Titus Andronicus* there are many more of the constituent elements of a compelling film narrative than in *The Tempest*: an Inciting Incident where Andronicus authorises the killing of Alarbus and sets in motion a revenge plot that destroys his family; a First Act Turning Point that sees Tamora pretend amity but swear revenge; a Midpoint where

²³² Orgel ed., p. 11.

Andronicus loses his right hand and two of his sons are murdered, following the rape and mutilation of his daughter – this leads him to take action to right these wrongs; the Second Act Turning Point brings news of Lucius massing with the Goths outside Rome; and lastly a climax of horrifying and absolute irreversibility. In addition, the characters have a lot at stake (the rule of Rome and the safety of family) and a number of antagonistic figures present a real and mortal threat: Tamora, Saturninus, Aaron, Chiron and Demetrius. In other words, Taymor is able to use her creativity whilst adhering to an existing structure that functions well as a narrative. In contrast, I argue that whilst she is creative in *The Tempest*, her faithfulness to the original structure of this play means her creativity cannot overcome the inherent lack of narrative drive. If Taymor fails in any way it is because she might have been more creative with the arrangement of the syuzhet than she chooses to be. In other words, I believe that it is unfair to criticise Taymor for taking a different approach to the one she takes with *Titus* – if anything it is too similar.

CHAPTER FOUR

HAMLET (1990)

Background

As discussed earlier, the need to cut Shakespeare's texts for the mainstream cinema is a response to the physical needs (and limits) of the medium; a two-hour film will tend to average approximately 10,000 words and thus most Shakespeare texts will need to be severely cut. However, as Ace Pilkington points out, this has not stopped purists criticising Franco Zeffirelli for 'his pruning of Shakespearean texts'. He quotes several critical views about the cuts in *Hamlet* (1990): for example Lewis Grossberger in a *Vogue* review writes 'Frankly, Franco, that ain't cutting, it's axplay'; Richard Corliss rues the fact that 'Sometimes the movie forgets that it's *Hamlet*; and James Bowman is of the opinion that 'It isn't *Hamlet* without the prince that I mind so much as *Hamlet* without the words'. This is not the first time that Zeffirelli has attracted such opprobrium; his *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) was 'praised for its action and blamed for its elimination of the poetry'.²³³ Pilkington estimates that the level of cuts to *Hamlet* was such that Zeffirelli kept just 37 per cent of the Complete Oxford text.²³⁴ The calculation is that Zeffirelli uses 9853 words of dialogue; this means he retains 33 per cent of the words in Q2 and the Folio that might reasonably be said to be available to him. In fact Zeffirelli mainly uses the Folio text with limited use of Q2 lines. In other words, he may have cut 67 per cent of the text

²³³ Ace G. Pilkington, 'Zeffirelli's Shakespeare' in Anthony Davies and Stanley W. Wells, *Shakespeare and the Moving Image : The Plays on Film and Television*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 163-79.

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 165.

but his figure of 9853 words is very close to the 10,000-word average. As a result, the main point that I wish to stress here is that criticising Zeffirelli for cutting the text in absolute terms suggests a basic misunderstanding of the limitations affecting filmmakers who attempt address a mainstream audience.

However, apart from the absolute amount of cutting that is required there is another variable, which as Pilkington observes, is the fact that Zeffirelli ‘rearranges and rewrites’. Cartmell also notes that ‘the film begins in Act 1 scene 2 and is drastically cut and rearranged’.²³⁵ As argued above, because 10,000 words is the average for a two-hour film, the term ‘drastically cut’ might more accurately be used to refer to the degree to which the number of words of dialogue falls below 10,000. As to the claim that it is ‘rearranged’, the questions that arise include whether parts of scenes are merely placed in different locations or moved to a different part of the syuzhet. Pilkington notes, for example: the intercutting of scenes 1.2 and 1.3 (also done by Olivier in 1948); the use of Horatio to inform Hamlet of the Ghost’s appearance rather than the audience experiencing it first; the scene where Hamlet is shown coming to Ophelia in disarray; the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy that now follows his confrontation with Ophelia; the fact that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s roles are reduced; Hamlet being shown on-board ship and changing the commission, but without the appearance of pirates; the sight of Ophelia drowned; and the public clash between Claudius and Hamlet (in 1.2) being relocated to a private rather than public space. In addition, there are significant cuts including the entire first scene and the removal of Fortinbras, with the latter change effectively excising the political dimension to the story. J. Lawrence Guntner writes that ‘whether to

²³⁵ Deborah Cartmell, ‘Zeffirelli and Shakespeare’ in Jackson, p. 223.

include Fortinbras and what he stands for' is a 'central question' of any production, not just film. The decision is important in the sense that it appears that Fortinbras 'may have been more important to Shakespeare than he has been to some directors'. Clearly to cut him completely, as Olivier does in 1948 and Zeffirelli does in 1990, 'amputates an important "political" element'.²³⁶ These are certainly a few of the larger-scale rearrangements that Zeffirelli makes; I will explore the impact of these changes (and others not mentioned here) in more detail later in the chapter because the rearrangements affect the narrative.

Pilkington also expands upon another of Zeffirelli's perceived sins in the eyes of the purists – rewriting. He is charged with replacing difficult words with 'others which are supposedly easier for his audience to grasp and by inserting entirely new lines for the same reason'. One example from *Hamlet* (1990) is the Player King's line (after 3.2.155) 'But should I die before a new sun shine, / You might another husband soon entwine'.²³⁷ Zeffirelli's defence of this and other changes is that he has to decide whether to make a film 'for a small number of people who know it all – and it's not very exciting to work for them – or really make some sacrifices and compromises but bring culture to a mass audience'.²³⁸ Robert Hapgood also notes that Zeffirelli declares himself to be a 'popularizer' and that this informs his attitude towards stage, opera and Shakespeare on film; he wants the 'plays to be enjoyed by ordinary people'.²³⁹ In his defence, Hapgood adds that despite 'wholesale cutting' of the texts he adapts, Zeffirelli 'makes much more use of Shakespeare's language than Shakespeare did of his

²³⁶ J. Lawrence Guntner, 'Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear on film' in *ibid.* pp. 120-40.

²³⁷ Davies and Wells, p. 168.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Robert Hapgood, 'Popularizing Shakespeare: The Artistry of Franco Zeffirelli' Boose and Burt, pp. 80-94.

own sources'.²⁴⁰ In fact, whilst it is unarguable that Zeffirelli wants to be a populariser and does cut the texts, any suggestion of wholesale rewriting is exaggerated. In reality, Zeffirelli changes very few lines completely and, although he uses 375 individual sections of text, on the whole he adopts the 'common stage practice of cutting within speeches and scenes'.²⁴¹ The types of changes he makes are similar to those in the following speech by Laertes:

It warms the very sickness in my heart,
That I shall [...] tell him to his teeth,
'thus DIEST thou'. 4.7 (53-55)

Here two words are deleted ('live and') along with 'diddest' changing to 'diest'. There are certainly a plethora of such minor changes in Zeffirelli's version but they are not, for example, the type of wholesale rewrites found in Julian Fellowes' *Romeo and Juliet* (2013). Here the film opens with four Shakespearean lines followed by four of the Fellowesian variety:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Two households, both alike in dignity
In fair Verona where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean
And so the Prince has called a tournament
To keep the battle from the city streets
Now rival Capulets and Montagues
May try their strength to gain the royal ring.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 81.

²⁴¹ Russell Jackson, 'From play-script to screenplay' in Jackson, p. 17.

These are the types of changes that are worth getting agitated about. If a minor digression might be forgiven, of the 24016 words in *Romeo and Juliet*, Fellowes employs just 4114 (on the basis of research completed during this project): he adds another 5904 of his own making – of a similar quality to the ones seen above. The following should be sufficient to provide an impression:

NURSE (V.O.)

My lady and my lord will soon be home
with news of the tournament.

JULIET

Then hurry, Nurse. Why do you dally so?

NURSE (O.S.)

I should so hurry until my heart gives out.

JULIET

Your heart is made of sterner stuff than that.

All of the above dialogue is spoken within the first three minutes of the film beginning – this has not been a case of picking out a handful of isolated changes. It is true to say that Zeffirelli makes nothing like this amount or type of changes to the text of *Hamlet* and so any suggestion of rewriting on a massive scale is misplaced.

Although Zeffirelli doesn't completely rewrite the text (in the sense of rewriting completely), Guntner argues that he 'breaks down longer speeches and scenes into bits and pieces'; this type of change 'detracts from Shakespeare's spoken language and highlights the sense of directorial control'.²⁴² Neil Taylor also makes the point that Zeffirelli is 'by far the most radical reshaper of the text', retaining just 'thirty-one per cent of the lines'. He 'cavalierly re-organizes the order of the text that remains, advancing and delaying speeches in a bewildering manner. The longer speeches and scenes are broken down into bite-sized

²⁴² Guntner in *ibid.* p. 124.

pieces'.²⁴³ It is not hard to detect the notes of dismay in these comments but, as already noted, Zeffirelli is obliged to cut the absolute numbers of words to fit within 129 minutes. To answer the second point, about reorganisation, the argument here is that the scenes are not reorganised in a cavalier fashion, but in a highly structured manner that seeks to enhance comprehensibility of the plot for a mainstream film audience. Of course, both of these points suggest further questions concerning how much text is cut, from where and how does this change the nature of the experience? This will be one of the main focuses of the chapter and will be explored in greater detail below.

Pilkington also alleges that not only does Zeffirelli have 'little respect' for scholars, he also 'does not have much faith in the audience to which he caters'. Pilkington suggests that Zeffirelli sees them as no more than a '*tabula rasa* on which the director must write in broad strokes'.²⁴⁴ As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, this appears to be an unfair accusation: what Zeffirelli does is reorganise the syuzhet to facilitate a type of storytelling that is familiar to a mainstream audience and that focuses on the forward-facing technique of suspense and of minimising retardation. This is not disrespecting the intelligence of the audience, but catering to them by using a familiar model. Of course, if one regards using the mainstream model as a demonstration of having little faith in the audience, then Zeffirelli is certainly guilty: the assumption here is that this is not the case.

What is incontrovertibly true is that this is a film aimed at the mass market and the casting of Hamlet reflects this. As Lynda Boose and Richard Burt point out, 'Mel Gibson as Hamlet means Hamlet as Lethal Weapon Four [...]' as

²⁴³ Neil Taylor, 'The Films of Hamlet' in Davies and Wells, p. 192.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 168-9.

Hollywood Hunk'.²⁴⁵ In a way this casting was in line with Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1992 film, *The Last Action Hero* (dir. John McTiernan), which 'most clearly allegorized the transformation of Hamlet from melancholy man into an image that could be valued by the young male consumers to whom newly technologized violence of the 1990s was being played'.²⁴⁶ Pilkington quotes Jonathan Romney's opinion supporting this assertion, stating that Gibson's Hamlet 'is unequivocally a man of action'.²⁴⁷ Harry Keyishian categorizes Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* as an 'action-adventure' film that 'provides the occasion for enjoyable violence'. The idea of revenge tragedy can also be linked to some of Gibson's previous films that Keyishian describes as 'revenge entertainments': for example, the *Mad Max* or *Lethal Weapon* movies.²⁴⁸ Taylor also observes that Zeffirelli 'has adopted the shooting style and, to some extent the narrative conventions, of [...] 1980s cinema and television action movies'. He justifies this description on the basis that 'in such films a slightly antisocial, often humorous, male hero (or pair of buddies) challenges a corrupt and evil male villain, finally outwitting and then killing him after scenes of extraordinary violence'.²⁴⁹ This creates visible points of interest in characterisation: for example, Gibson's Hamlet pursues the Ghost in an aggressive manner with his 'sword outward', compared to Olivier's version from 1948, where he holds his sword protectively 'in the form of a cross'.²⁵⁰ This is, according to Taylor, a

²⁴⁵ Boose and Burt, p. 9.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Pilkington in Davies and Wells, p. 174.

²⁴⁸ Harry Keyishian, 'Shakespeare and movie genre: the case of Hamlet' in Jackson, pp. 72-84.

²⁴⁹ Neil Taylor, 'The Films of Hamlet' in Davies and Wells, p. 192.

²⁵⁰ Keyishian in Jackson, p. 77.

‘Hamlet who can make up his mind’ and notes that the video blurb accompanying the film talks of a Hamlet ‘more macho than melancholy’.²⁵¹

This is, of course, criticism that originates from when Gibson’s transtextual action hero qualities were current; viewed some 25 years later, it must be at least possible that young people watching *Hamlet* (1990) in the classroom may, unfortunately, be just as likely to have echoes of Mel Gibson as a drunken, ageing, anti-Semite than an action hero. Nevertheless, the aim of the casting, at the time, was to bring action-hero qualities to the role and Boose and Burt observe that it is precisely this type of ‘heroically imagined male violence that is both promulgated by American film and simultaneously guarantees the industry its seemingly unassailable hegemony’.²⁵² As a result, they worry about the ‘anti-intellectual machismo’ of the audience and ‘what kind of an American Hamlet is destined to succeed Mel Gibson’s action hero’.²⁵³ The answer, ironically, was not an intensification of the trend, but one that evolved to include Ethan Hawke’s ‘slacker’ Hamlet, which is the subject of the next chapter – about as far from the emotional action-hero as it seems possible to imagine.

In relation to casting, Zeffirelli’s *Hamlet* pairs the ‘suicidally-inclined action hero’ Mel Gibson, with the ‘threatening “other woman”’, Glenn Close.²⁵⁴ This becomes problematic in Pilkington’s opinion because of ‘Glenn Close’s refusal to act her age’; an issue that also prompts Edward Quinn to observe that *Hamlet* becomes ‘a fluid, excitingly paced movie about two middle-aged, star-crossed lovers’.²⁵⁵ This is somewhat unfair to Glenn Close who was 43 at the

²⁵¹ Taylor in Davies and Wells, p. 192.

²⁵² Boose and Burt, p. 9.

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 18.

²⁵⁴ Guntner in Jackson, p. 124.

²⁵⁵ Pilkington in Davies and Wells, p. 175.

time, whilst Gibson was 34 and Alan Bates was 56. Therefore, in actual fact, she was closer in age to Gibson than to Bates and any issue must partly be the fault of the casting rather than the actor. Cartmell also brings together the idea of cuts and casting; she argues that 'in this drastically cut version of Shakespeare's play, Zeffirelli enlarges the role of the women' and that it is 'almost as if Zeffirelli has produced a feminist version of the play'.²⁵⁶ In support of that idea, Neil Taylor adds that Gibson only appears in forty per cent of the shots.²⁵⁷ This research looks at this question to ask how much these roles are enlarged and what is the effect?

Despite Boose and Burt's observations that this is mainstream fare aimed at a violence-suffused youth market, they also argue that Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* was less of a success than his earlier Shakespeare films – *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1968); this is because it is 'far less oriented to a young audience'.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, *Hamlet* was still highly successful in relation to other Shakespeare films made in the 1990s; it took US\$20m in the United States alone and got as high as 9th in the charts during its first week of wide release (January 18-24, 1991). The only Shakespeare films to exceed this in the 1990s were *Romeo+Juliet* in 1996, taking US\$46m, and *Much Ado About Nothing* in 1993, taking US\$22m.

Zeffirelli argues that his success with *Hamlet* (1990) is partly due to the fact that he makes a 'radical return to the original' and that the 'only revolutionary claim any director can make is to have seen what no one has

²⁵⁶ Deborah Cartmell, 'Zeffirelli and Shakespeare' in Jackson, p. 219.

²⁵⁷ Davies and Wells, p. 192.

²⁵⁸ Boose and Burt, p. 18.

bothered to see since the author compiled the work'.²⁵⁹ Part of this return to the original is to set the story in the purported time that it was set – which appears to be the 12th/13th century setting associated with the Nordic story of Amleth.²⁶⁰ Whether this makes it more authentic (or to what degree Shakespeare based his story on this source) is clearly a matter of debate but, in the context of this thesis, what became apparent was that the setting has an unexpected and fundamental effect on narrative coherence. This will be explored in more depth (below) in the research findings.

Pilkington sums up by saying that, whilst Zeffirelli claims to be making *Hamlet* accessible, 'with most of the politics gone, while sex and violence are foregrounded, what is left of the plot can be somewhat confusing, sending the audience to other versions or even to the text, which could arguably be part of Zeffirelli's intention in this film [...], not only to popularize, but to energize and even to tantalize'.²⁶¹ The argument in the rest of this chapter is that Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* is far from confusing, is actually very carefully structured and what is left of the plot (in terms of the key events or kernels) is considerable. In fact, this film has a high degree of narrative coherence and whilst it is different to the play in many ways (as it must be due to the cuts) it is clear where and why the cuts have been made.

The structure of *Hamlet*

Before looking at the specific cuts that are made and how they alter the telling of the story, the intention is to begin by reviewing the broad structure of the

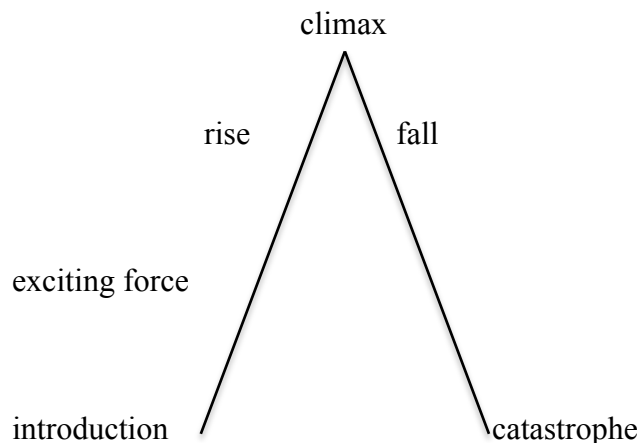
²⁵⁹ Cartmell in Jackson, p. 220.

²⁶⁰ William Shakespeare, Ann Thompson, and Neil Taylor, *Hamlet*, (London: AS, Arden Shakespeare, 2006), pp. 64-70.

²⁶¹ Pilkington in Davies and Wells, p. 176.

original play (the F and Q2 version printed in the Norton edition). There is a state of unease or discontent in Hamlet (or ‘lack’ to use the name Vladimir Propp gave it), which is confirmed by the Ghost’s revelation that he was murdered. Hamlet is given a goal at the end of Act 1 (to take revenge) but reworks this to create his own interim goal (to establish Claudius’s guilt). This is achieved midway through scene 3.2 when he sees Claudius’s reaction to the play-within-the-play (52% of the way through the Norton text formatted in *Final Draft* – page 88 of 168). At this point he commits to ‘drink hot blood’ (the end of 3.2). If the end of 3.2 is taken as the midpoint, this leaves 16,711 words in the first half (56%); this is not dissimilar to the percentage (53% or 12,624 words) in the first half of *Romeo and Juliet* (1.1 – 3.1). In other words, *Hamlet* broadly follows the shape of tragic stories outlined in Chapter One (see illustration below).

FREYTAG’S PYRAMID



After 3.2 comes the death of Polonius and the banishment of Hamlet, as Claudius reacts decisively. Again, similar to *Romeo and Juliet*, the second half of the play is also the time when the focus moves to the supporting characters.

The first thing to point out, before looking at the effect of these changes in detail, is that in the original play there are several key moments during which

the action is set up before it then turns in new directions. To describe these changes of direction the language of the screenwriting manuals will be employed (these are guides published to help screenwriters structure their work). The suggestion here is that their terminology and definitions are useful in a limited way to describe the key moments in *Hamlet* – and of the films made of the play. The first of these moments is called an Initiating Incident, which is the term that Syd Field uses to describe a ‘scene or sequence (that) would best capture the attention of the reader or audience’.²⁶² In the play of *Hamlet* this is the sighting of the Ghost by Horatio. This is followed by the same character’s narration, explaining what has happened in Denmark and the parallels he draws between the Denmark of the story and ancient Rome: namely meteorological events such as Q2’s ‘dews of blood’ (1.1.106.10) and the threat posed by Fortinbras to the security of the state. The main function of such a scene is the effect it has on the audience – it sets a certain type of mood. A second moment is described by Robert McKee as the Inciting Incident and differs from Field’s term on the basis that it tends to have an affect on one character (or at the least a very limited group of characters). This event ‘radically upsets the balance of forces in the character’s life’ causing him or her to do something in order to ‘restore that balance’.²⁶³ In this sense, the play’s Inciting Incident occurs when Hamlet sees the Ghost for himself and is told about his father’s murder (1.5.25). This raises the major question of the story: how and when will Hamlet take revenge? It should also be noted that the main character must experience this incident

²⁶² Syd Field, *Screenplay : The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Rev. edn (New York, N.Y.: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 2005), p. 89.

²⁶³ McKee, pp. 189-95.

personally – it cannot be reported because it lessens the dramatic impact.²⁶⁴ Each subplot should then have its own Inciting Incident, although it is not necessary for these to be shown on screen.²⁶⁵ The intention is not to explore the sub plots in detail here, but to point out that Ophelia's Inciting Incident occurs when Polonius bars her from seeing Hamlet (1.3); Laertes' occurs when he hears of his father's death (anytime after 3.3); Polonius's happens when he is informed of Hamlet's madness and he, arguably, sees an opportunity to elevate his family via a royal marriage, having rejected this option earlier (2.1).

Once the main line of action is established, in this case Hamlet's revenge plot, there are three or four pivotal moments in which the action moves in an unexpected direction (sometimes surprising both the audience and the characters simultaneously, sometimes one or the other). Again, to use the terminology of the screenplay manuals these are called the First Act Turning Point, the Midpoint, the Second Act Turning Point and the Climax. At each of these moments there is an 'incident, episode or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction'.²⁶⁶ McKee adds that the essence of a Turning Point concerns 'the choice a character makes under pressure to take one action or another in the pursuit of a desire'.²⁶⁷ Opinions differ as to how many major Turning Points are needed. McKee argues for three (Act 1, Act 2 and Climax); Linda Aronson argues for four (Act 1, a Midpoint, Act 2 and the Climax);²⁶⁸ John Yorke, thinks

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 198.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Field, pp. 27, 143.

²⁶⁷ McKee, pp. 248-9.

²⁶⁸ Linda Aronson, *The 21st-Century Screenplay : A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2010), p. 52.

there are five (Act 1, three during Act 2, and the Climax).²⁶⁹ The approach taken here (as noted in Chapter One), is to match this terminology with Chatman's idea of kernels and satellites. As a reminder, Chatman names major events *kernels* and argues that they 'advanc[e] the plot by raising and satisfying questions' and are 'nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths'. He goes on to say that 'kernels cannot be deleted without destroying the narrative logic'.²⁷⁰ Chatman names minor plot events *satellites*, arguing that these are less crucial and can be deleted 'without disturbing the logic of the plot'. In contrast to kernels they are moments *where no choices are required* and are 'solely the workings out of the choices made at the kernels' (italics added).²⁷¹ Lastly, it is worth clarifying that, as Kristin Thompson points out, major Turning Points are 'not literally a single moment, but an action that may last for some time' and that they 'determine the shape that the next large-scale portion [of the story] must take'.²⁷²

Taking all of this into account, the argument is that the major turning points that affect Hamlet and spin the action in new directions are:

1. The sighting of the Ghost by Hamlet, the revelation of the murder, and the commitment to revenge (1.5)
 - This propels the actions to rectify the situation
2. The revelation (via the play-within-the-play) that Claudius is guilty, ending with the 'Now could I drink hot blood' soliloquy (3.2)

²⁶⁹ John Yorke, *Into the Woods : A Five-Act Journey Into Story*, (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 32-44.

²⁷⁰ Chatman, p. 53.

²⁷¹ Ibid. p. 54.

²⁷² Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood : Understanding Classical Narrative Technique*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 30, 33.

- This propels Hamlet's actions to kill Claudius (and by accident slay Polonius), which in turn prompts Claudius's plan to have Hamlet killed
3. News of the return of Hamlet to Denmark (4.6) or the physical return at the graveside (5.1)
 - This brings the main protagonists face-to-face and propels Claudius's new plans to kill Hamlet
 4. The deaths of Hamlet, Claudius and Gertrude (5.2)
 - The fulfilment of the tragic line of action

Some critics might question the selection of elements 2 and 3 as major turning points; after all they do not appear at the end of Acts as marked out in most standard editions of the text. The argument here is that, as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor discuss in their Arden edition of *Hamlet*, 'Act and scene divisions are more important today as reference points for readers rather than for performers'. They also make the point that the divisions between Acts 3 and 4 have been, and continue to be, the subject of debate between scholars. For example, Dowden argues that Act 3 should 'open with Hamlet's advice to the players' (3.2 in the Norton edition), whilst Act 4 'should open with the march of Fortinbras' (4.4 in the Norton edition).²⁷³ Thompson and Taylor also add that 'not many scholars today would endorse the view of T.M. Baldwin in 1944 that Shakespeare, like other Elizabethans, would have assumed that all plays had five acts.'²⁷⁴ In other words, it is at least debatable how many Acts there are and where to place the breaks. The suggestions (above) are based upon the changing of

²⁷³ Shakespeare, Thompson, and Taylor, p. 544.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 545.

Hamlet's goals (3.2) and his return to Denmark (4.6). However, the most important point is that these events form part of the spine of the *Hamlet* story.

If these are four key events, there are clearly other important moments in the play that involve Hamlet and might be categorised as kernels, which as noted earlier, are 'branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths':

1. The sighting of the Ghost by Horatio and the decision to tell Hamlet (1.1)
2. Gertrude's decision to request that Hamlet stays in Denmark (1.2)
3. The decision by Polonius to restrict Ophelia's access to Hamlet (1.3)
4. Hamlet's decision to put on an 'antic disposition' (1.5)
5. The decision to send Hamlet to England (3.3)
6. Hamlet's decision NOT to kill Claudius in the Chapel because the latter is praying and would thus go to Heaven rather than to Hell
7. Hamlet's decision to kill the person behind the arras, which happened to be Polonius but might have been Claudius (3.4)²⁷⁵
8. Claudius's decision to have Hamlet executed (4.3)
9. The announcement of Hamlet's return to Denmark (4.6)
10. Hamlet's decision to announce his presence at the graveside (5.1)
11. Hamlet's decision to accept the challenge to fight Laertes (5.2)
12. Hamlet's decision to kill Claudius

Lastly, there are the types of events that might be regarded as satellites:

1. Claudius's decision to deal with the threat from Fortinbras (1.2)
2. Polonius sending Reynaldo to spy on Laertes (2.1)

²⁷⁵ The decision to put this in the list of kernels as opposed to categorising it as a Major Turning Point has been done on the basis that this action does not affect Hamlet's subsequent decision-making. However, it is certainly a key moment in the plot as whole because it prompts a reaction from Claudius and precipitates the tragic events that affect Ophelia and that spur Laertes to take revenge.

3. The arrival of the players (2.2)
4. Hamlet meeting the forces of Fortinbras on the plain (4.4)
5. Hamlet's discussion with the gravediggers (5.1)
6. Hamlet's decision to leap into the grave and fight Laertes (5.1)
7. Fortinbras assuming control of Denmark (5.2)

Clearly, these are not all of the events in the play – as part of the research for this project 122 separate events have been identified. Even this short list, however, raises the issue of what a kernel is and what a satellite. This issue will become more concrete during discussion of Zeffirelli's and then Almereyda's films because the various choices help create very different versions of the story.

***Hamlet*: The scale of the adaptation challenge**

Looking at the editing challenge, Zeffirelli reduces a text of 29,747 words to 9853 words – a cut of 67%.²⁷⁶ This translates (based on a running time of 129 minutes) to 76 words per minutes of screen time, a little less than the average.²⁷⁷ If 83 words is taken as a guide figure, this suggests that Zeffirelli could have used up to 11,000 words. Another challenge posed by the Norton text of *Hamlet* includes the fact that the *average* number of words per speech for several of the characters (The Player King, the Ghost, The Player Queen, Claudius, Hamlet and Polonius) substantially exceeds the mainstream norm of 12-15 words. In Zeffirelli's film, despite the cuts, several of the characters still have relatively long speech lengths on average (see Table below).

²⁷⁶ This figure of 9853 includes words and lines modernized or invented by Zeffirelli.

²⁷⁷ To generate the data for comparison between the Norton text and *Hamlet* (1990) the dialogue was transcribed directly from the DVD version of the film into *Final Draft* and cross-checked for comprehension – where necessary – with sub-titles.

WORDS PER SPEECH

	Hamlet	Claudius	Polonius	Ghost	Player King	Player Queen
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	30	34	30	48	84	47
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	23	17	23	60	22	22

In fact, the Ghost's average speech length is longer in the film than in the play; he speaks just six times and has 355 words. In other words, this suggests that Zeffirelli does not reduce all of the dialogue to a uniform length. He does, however, reduce the speech lengths of other characters to bring them down to somewhere near the mainstream norm (see Table below). These characters do not pose as much of a challenge as more prominent characters because they do not, in general, have large numbers of speeches, extended speeches or soliloquys. The two that do need reduction (Laertes and the First Gravedigger) are given substantially smaller roles in the film: Laertes' role is reduced from 1439 to 441 words (-69%) and the gravedigger reduces from 731 to 166 (-77%). This results in two of their longer speeches being reduced substantially or deleted (see 1.3.10-44) and 5.1-56 respectively).

WORDS PER SPEECH

	Gertrude	Ophelia	Laertes	Horatio	First Gravedigger	Rosencrantz
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	14	18	21	18	22	15
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	13	16	15	12	14	9

Deborah Cartmell observes that Zeffirelli makes this a 'feminist version' of *Hamlet* and it is true that the female roles are increased. Gertrude has 7% of the dialogue in Zeffirelli's film and Ophelia 5% (see chart below);²⁷⁸ in contrast, Claudius and Horatio's roles are cut. However, it is also true to say that the role

²⁷⁸ Cartmell, 'Zeffirelli and Shakespeare' in *ibid.* p. 219.

of Polonius remains the same (in percentage terms) and, although Neil Taylor observes that Gibson only appears in forty per cent of the shots, Hamlet actually has 47% of the film dialogue – up from 39% in the play.²⁷⁹ So although there is certainly an increased role for women, this comes at the expense of more minor roles such as Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, rather than the primary male characters.

	Hamlet	Claudius	Polonius	Horatio	Gertrude	Ophelia
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	39%	13%	9%	7%	3%	3%
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	47%	11%	9%	4%	7%	5%

Looking next at a brief overview of the way Zeffirelli chooses to cut at the level of Acts, (see Table below), it is also clear that his cuts to Acts 4 and 5 are not dissimilar to Luhrmann. However, it is noticeable that he also makes extensive cuts to Act 2 (72%) and the reasons for these excisions will be explored in a more detailed discussion on the following pages.

	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3	Act 4	Act 5	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	6618	5646	7008	5073	5402	29,747
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	2671	1592	2846	1351	1393	9853
<i>Percentage cut</i>	60%	72%	60%	73%	74%	67%

***Hamlet* (1990) – Opening to First Act Turning Point**

Against this broad background, the next step is to look at the way Zeffirelli changes the syuzhet, compared to one designed by Shakespeare, and how this affects the story as a whole. To begin with the first section of the story – running

²⁷⁹ Neil Taylor in Davies and Wells, p. 193.

until the end of Act 1 – it is clear that all of 1.1 is cut and at least 40% of every other scene (see Table):

HAMLET (1990)

	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	1332	2047	1080	713	1446	6618
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	0	1210	471	286	704	2671
<i>Percentage cut</i>	100%	41%	56%	60%	51%	60%

Scene Intercutting from Opening to First Act Turning Point
1.2
1.3
1.2
1.4
1.5

In addition, there is limited intercutting of scenes. The only major change in order occurs with the interpolation of scene 3 between two halves of 1.2. In other words, the order of the film syuzhet is relatively similar to the Shakespearean syuzhet – at least at the surface level. The detailed changes create significant interpretational differences in Act 1. However, as will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, in contrast to the

rest of the film (beginning with Act 2 and beyond), this ordering of the syuzhet at this point is relatively stable,

Opening to end of Act 1

The action begins with a tableau of static figures in a courtyard. This mirrors the final shot of the film (in the sense that that it is also very pictorial and static), making the narration very self-conscious at both of these points: there is a heightened sense that a story is being told. The presence of the camera breathes life into the characters and its absence removes life. Given that much of the film is relatively realistic in style (for example in the use of period dress and realistic acting, with continuity editing effacing the presence of the camera), this is a

surprising choice. However, what this unusual technique might help to accomplish is a degree of preparation for those moments when the narration will become more self-conscious during the telling – for example, when the soliloquies are spoken out loud and the other characters within earshot seem to remain unaware of this.

The excision of 1.1 reveals that far from being a kernel, Zeffirelli regards this entire scene as a satellite; the information about the Ghost, the death of the king, the meteorological peculiarities and the threat of Fortinbras are surplus to requirements. These cuts have three clear effects: first, the sense of Fate intervening (e.g. there is no mention of the circumstances surrounding the death of Caesar, nor that there has been a murder based on the idea of political

Lines retained
1.2 (107-112)

ambition); second, news of the sighting of the Ghost is subject to retardation and will now be experienced simultaneously by the main character and the audience, whereas Shakespeare exposed his audience to the ghost immediately; third, there is now no external threat to Denmark, turning the story into a domestic issue rather than a political one. From another perspective the film's opening foregrounds the familial conflict in a scene that imagines the funeral of Old Hamlet (accompanied by just 42 words of dialogue from 1.2.107-12). It shows, in close-up, five of the main characters – Gertrude, Claudius, Old Hamlet (Ghost), Polonius and Hamlet within the first three minutes.²⁸⁰ In addition, the attraction between Gertrude and Claudius is foreshadowed as she looks up towards the latter, with his small facial reactions (flaring nostrils and movements of the muscles in his face) communicating the level of his desire for her that he must try and suppress in

²⁸⁰ For ease of reference the lines that are used in the film are printed in the inset boxes next to the relevant commentary.

public – a look not missed by Hamlet who is then identified by the first words spoken in the film: ‘Hamlet, think of us as of a father’. Hamlet’s antipathy is then communicated by silence and by him walking away into the darkness and from the light within which the new king stands.

These initial choices are important because the perception of the audience is affected to a disproportionate degree by the primacy effect – or the conclusions that are drawn from initial impressions. This arrangement of the syuzhet puts the interpersonal conflict as a central concern; it establishes Hamlet as the outsider who refuses to communicate with his stepfather and stimulates feelings of empathy with him. In addition, the structure of the scene encourages the development of particular hypotheses:²⁸¹ why is Hamlet so reluctant to speak, what is going to happen to the relationship between the king and the woman, how did the other man die and what will happen next? In other words, at this point there is possibly more curiosity about the past than expectations of any particular actions in the future. If this is contrasted with the questions generated by the film and Shakespeare’s syuzhet they are very different. Questions suggested by the play text might include: why is the ghost of the former king walking, does the connection between Caesar and Old Hamlet mean he was murdered, who is Fortinbras and will the threat from Norway result in war?

Given that one of the aims of mainstream film storytelling is comprehensibility, the first scene clearly delineates the main players and

Lines retained
1.2 (1-12)
1.2 (14)

establishes relationships. This clarity then pays off in the following scene when the first of the questions above is answered – the man and woman have married. Here just 15

²⁸¹ Clearly some of these hypotheses assume one does not know the play.

of the first 39 lines are used as Claudius explains the marriage, with a camera move to the courtiers for a reaction shot as he speaks the words ‘hath discretion fought with nature’, indicating the marriage has been the subject of some debate. Although the speech is long in mainstream film terms (94 words), this is a public speech and therefore it is reasonable.

Lines retained
1.2 (42-43)
1.2 (45)
1.2 (50)
1.2 (55-63)

As indicated by the opening scene, the action then becomes more intimate. What in Shakespeare’s syuzhet was a public scene demonstrating the power and generosity of the king in allowing Laertes to return to France, becomes a family

conversation. Jackson notes that it is usual for theatre directors to cut ‘within speeches and scenes’ and it is clear that Zeffirelli follows the same pattern (see inset box).²⁸²

Lines retained
1.2 (64-67)
1.2 (87-90)
1.2 (92-95)
1.2 (112-114)
1.2 (122)
1.2 (117)

The same process then applies to the scene with Hamlet. In Shakespeare’s syuzhet this is a scene where Claudius is humiliated by his stepson, followed by a public dressing-down of Hamlet and the denial of his request to return to Wittenberg. Whilst the essence of the action is retained, it is

converted into a family disagreement in private, which removes the political aspect of a public confrontation. Zeffirelli cuts within the speeches and the chronological order barely changes compared to the original play, retaining the level of conflict and antipathy. What is lost occurs purely as a result of resetting the action in a private space, where Hamlet’s retorts become more like filial rebellion than a public repudiation of his stepfather. This is in keeping with the less political atmosphere of the film, exemplified by the cutting of Fortinbras.

²⁸² Jackson, p. 17.

However, Zeffirelli's choice in the mise-en-scene also places Claudius, drinking vessel in hand, in front of a mannequin covered in armour and chain mail – reminiscent of Hamlet's father in the tomb. What's more, Gertrude is shown with her arm draped over this mannequin; these choices at the very least highlight the contrast between the new king/father/husband and the man who has recently died – a contrast that will be picked up by a line that is displaced from this scene to later in the syuzhet.

The nature of the change to the syuzhet is shown by the fact that Claudius then leaves and the 'cast thy nighted colour off' exchange occurs purely between Gertrude and Hamlet. The way the syuzhet is reorganised can be seen clearly

Lines retained
1.2 (68-77)
1.2 (82-86)
1.2 (118-120)
1.2 (123-4)

when looking at the line selection (see inset box). Moving this encounter between mother and son into a discrete private moment changes the relationship between husband and wife. In the Shakespearean syuzhet Gertrude is required to

intervene publicly to get Hamlet to agree to stay in Denmark, which undermines Claudius's authority. Here she builds on Claudius's demands and coaxes Hamlet to stay. This pattern will be seen elsewhere, where Close's Gertrude does not publicly intervene to plead on behalf of Claudius in the face of attack from Laertes. In addition, the private moment between mother and son enables Zeffirelli, Close and Gibson to pursue an overtly Freudian reading of the relationship, with Gertrude kissing her son on the lips after he has fallen to the floor and pressed his head against her stomach.

Lines retained
1.2 (129-146)

This initial sequence of the film is then completed with Hamlet's first soliloquy ('O that this too, too sullied flesh'), which articulates the time that has elapsed since the

death of his father and his mother's remarriage. Within moments the tone shifts from intimacy with his mother, to disgust as she rides off with Claudius. This is the longest unbroken speech so far in the film – 17 lines – with the remainder of the soliloquy cut. These cuts include lines such as 'like Niobe all tears', which has been illustrated via Gertrude's tears over the grave in the opening scene. However, it is also notable that the reference to 'incestuous sheets' is cut, perhaps because Gertrude's relationship with her son may also raise such thoughts, complicating the reading. From a stylistic perspective one emerging pattern is Zeffirelli's resistance to letting the camera dwell in one place for too long. Although the initial six lines of the soliloquy are spoken in close-up (129-135), the camera then becomes more restless and overtly links the subject of his disgust (Gertrude's relationship with Claudius) via the use of 10 separate cuts that illustrate the text. Zeffirelli appears determined to make the text as comprehensible as possible.

This analysis shows that the opening sequence (taken from 1.2.1-146) is significantly different to the Shakespearean syuzhet and not just because the first scene is invented and set in the tomb. Here the reorganisation of parts of the scene, taken in tandem with the setting, changes the thematic interpretation from the politics of the state to the politics of the family – and places the intimacy of the mother/son relationship as central to the story.

Lines retained	At this point in the play, having announced the intention to contact Hamlet at the end of 1.1, Shakespeare has Horatio deliver the news of the Ghost, continuing the emphasis on the central plot. In contrast, because Zeffirelli has not raised this issue, he is able to cut to the beginning of 1.3 and introduce
1.3 (1-2)	
1.3 (5-6)	
1.3 (9-10)	
1.3 (14)	
1.3 (16-21)	
1.3 (29-30)	

an important subplot that will affect Hamlet; this involves Laertes, Ophelia and Polonius. The power of the primacy effect is also apparent because the positioning of this scene makes Ophelia and Laertes relatively more important in the overall story. Zeffirelli applies the same inter-speech textual cutting strategies, simplifying the dialogue and cutting Laertes' lecture to Ophelia from almost 44 lines down to just 15 (including Ophelia's half-line 'No more but so?' (1.3.30). This is, in many ways, perfectly understandable (in terms of narrative comprehension).

Where Shakespeare opts for verbal redundancy – telling the audience on two occasions that Hamlet's 'will is not his own' (1.3.17) and that he cannot act 'further / Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal' (1.3.27-8) – Zeffirelli directs the audience's attention towards Ophelia's reactions: after Laertes has offered the advice that Hamlet's love was a 'fashion and a toy in blood', the camera spends most of its time following Ophelia. As noted earlier, it is much more difficult for an audience to follow the words when the speaker is out of shot. As a result, there is more focus on the way Ophelia seems to be gently ignoring his advice than accepting it. Another reason for this choice (and the size of the cuts) is the lack of conflict in this part of the scene. Laertes has no power over this sister and there is no overt clash between them: and from the way the scene is shot it is clear that she will ignore his advice (she shows no signs of stress or irritation). This decision by Zeffirelli will also place a much greater weight on Polonius's command to Ophelia later in the scene. One further point to notice here is Zeffirelli's use of visual cues; he places this meeting in the same sewing room where she will later meet the 'mad' Hamlet. Again, a good example of making the storyline comprehensible.

The next phase of the scene sees Polonius lecture Laertes on his behaviour in France. Although Zeffirelli gives Polonius a relatively long segment

Lines retained
1.3 (55-63)
1.3 (65-68)
1.3 (70-72)
1.3 (75-80)
1.3 (83-86)

of his speech uninterrupted (lines 55-63), the camera again functions to draw the attention away from the words and towards reactions. As Hatchuel points out, the result of the action/reaction format is that ‘when the camera shows a character, and *then* this character’s point of view,²⁸³ the

spectators identify with their own gaze while identifying the subjective vision as that of the character momentarily absent from the screen. The image is thus made subjective by the very context of the film’.²⁸⁴ Here a wide shot first allows the eye to be distracted by the passing citizens and the camera then lingers on Ophelia. In a full-length shot of the family, the emphasis is on Laertes’ and Ophelia’s amused reaction to the lecture rather than the content: in other words the narration is drawing our attention towards the meaninglessness of these words rather than their portent. In fact the only moment of emphasis comes at the end – where Polonius warns (in close-up) that Laertes must ‘to thine own self be true / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man’ (1.3.78-80). This focus draws our attention to the one piece of advice that echoes throughout the story – what does it mean to be true to oneself; and does it follow that being true to oneself means one cannot be false to another man? After all, Claudius is both true to himself and false to others simultaneously. In other words, Zeffirelli’s careful coordination of shot type and word choice acts as a selective focus in a way that has considerable narrative

²⁸³ This use of ‘point of view’ here means optical point of view, rather than the personal opinion of the character.

²⁸⁴ Hatchuel, p. 53.

power. In addition, in this scene Zeffirelli cuts away three times to Hamlet who is observing the conversation, with a wide shot from his optical point-of-view. Hamlet's unspeaking presence at this point prompts hypotheses: why is he watching and why is he making sure he isn't seen? These are ultimately questions that are never overtly answered by the film, except to say that they draw our attention to the idea of distrust, spying and overhearing that will form such an important theme in the story.

The idea of distrust is then picked up in the final phase of the scene, which is a kernel of the film's action: Polonius's command that Ophelia must not

Lines retained	
1.3 (88-92)	‘slander any moment leisure / As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet’ (1.3.133-4). Again, it is clear (see inset box) that Zeffirelli continues the process of in-speech editing. Of particular note is that Polonius mentions the way the ‘blood burns’ and ‘fashion’ rather than Hamlet’s social position or Polonius’s social embarrassment being the primary issues (see the cuts between lines 118-131). Taken in tandem with Laertes’s earlier comment about Hamlet’s love being a ‘fashion and a toy in blood’ the emphasis is firmly on Hamlet’s unreliability as a youthful lover as opposed to reservations about Ophelia being unable to marry above her social station. The theme of overhearing is developed again as Hamlet secretly observes the action and crucially hears Polonius’s instruction to Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet but not her reluctant reply.
1.3 (99-101)	
1.3 (103-105)	
1.3 (107)	
1.3 (110-117)	
1.3 (132-133)	
1.3 (134-136)	

Polonius’s social embarrassment being the primary issues (see the cuts between lines 118-131). Taken in tandem with Laertes’s earlier comment about Hamlet’s love being a ‘fashion and a toy in blood’ the emphasis is firmly on Hamlet’s unreliability as a youthful lover as opposed to reservations about Ophelia being unable to marry above her social station. The theme of overhearing is developed again as Hamlet secretly observes the action and crucially hears Polonius’s instruction to Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet but not her reluctant reply.

In a structural sense what is important about this reorganisation of the syuzhet, along with the textual editing and shot selection, is that the narration is developing in a significantly different way to the play. Where the play introduces

the Ghost and the threat to the state as primary concerns, this story foregrounds erotic and familial love along with hints of incestuous desire as the primary foci. In this sense, despite its 12th/13th Century setting, the story has a contemporary perspective.

Having set up these relationships, Zeffirelli (some 16 minutes into the film) is finally ready to introduce one of the first significant developments in the main plot: Horatio's announcement that he has seen the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

Lines retained
1.2 (160)
1.2 (161)
1.2 (166-169)
1.2 (172-173)
1.2 (175-183)
1.2 (185-196)
1.2 (198-199)
1.2 (201)
1.2 (202-221)
1.2 (223-225)
1.2 (229-230)
1.2 (231-234)
1.2 (241-242)
1.2 (246-247)
1.2 (252-257)

The pattern of inter-speech editing in chronological order is again evident (see inset box) with the exception of a relatively long unbroken speech by Horatio (1.2.202-212). However, this longer speech is accommodated by virtue of the fact that, overall, the scene comprises predominantly short exchanges of dialogue. Stylistically Zeffirelli's begins with a wide shot of the castle battlements and the shot sizes become closer and closer as the action develops towards the revelation that the Ghost of Hamlet's father has been seen.

Here the focus is on Horatio and his reluctance to say what he has seen for fear of ridicule. In this sense the film narration addresses the audience at this point as much as the character, because if Horatio was too credulous then they might be prompted to laugh. In the film there is a reverse of the situation in the play where Horatio - as a scholar - is the reliable witness that validates the Ghost's existence for the early modern audience. Here, because 1.1 is cut, both Hamlet and the audience need reliable witnesses to back up Horatio's claim. To achieve this Zeffirelli cuts away to the guards following the words 'Season your admiration for a while / With an attent ear till I may deliver / Upon

the witness of these gentlemen, / This marvel to you'. The sight of the uncomplicated everyman characters helps to verify the sighting for the audience. In terms used by the screenplay manuals, this is the beginning of the Inciting Incident for the film (some 20 minutes in). It begins the process of destabilising the main character that is developed in the following scene. As a last observation, the news of the Ghost's appearance is relayed on the balcony of Hamlet's room; this is the same place that he will receive news from Osric of the challenge to fence against Laertes – another example of Zeffirelli using location to link the narration and to make it comprehensible.

Lines retained	In the final movement of Act 1, there is no retardation: it
1.2 (125-126)	moves swiftly from the revelation of the sighting to the
1.4 (8)	midnight watch and the impending sighting of the Ghost –
1.4 (14-16)	in contrast to the play where scene 1.3 intervenes. However,
1.4 (17-18)	Zeffirelli takes this opportunity to begin the scene by
1.4 (18.1-18.3)	repositioning two lines from scene 1.2: 'No jocund health
1.4 (18.4)	
1.4 (18.6)	

that Denmark drinks today / But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell' (1.1.125-126) and accompanying them with overhead shots of Claudius feasting. In terms of characterisation these shots play an important role (vis-s-vis the primacy effect) because Claudius has already been observed drinking (in the private room with Hamlet and Gertrude). This moment reinforces an impression of hedonism and Epicureanism that is immediately juxtaposed with Hamlet, dressed in black, looking down on the feast from (again) a balcony. The use of lines extracted from Q2 concerning 'this heavy-headed revel' reinforces the sense of Hamlet's alienation not just from Claudius but from the King's whole

way of life; a contrast that will be made even more apparent by the juxtaposition of the feasting with the appearance of the Ghost.

Hamlet is then further distanced from the feasting as he walks out onto the battlements and observes the warm colours from an even higher, darker,

Lines retained
1.4 (1)
1.4 (3)
1.4 (6-7)
1.4 (18.7-8)
1.4 (18.17)
1.4 (18.19-20)
1.4 (19-23)
1.4 (25-26)
1.4 (44-48)
1.4 (50-55)
1.4 (56-57)
1.4 (62-63)

colder and more remote vantage point; this leads him to reflect not just on Claudius but on the ‘particular fault’ that may condemn any man. The inter-speech editing pattern continues as the Ghost appears and the text that is cut (including ‘the sepulchre / Wherein we saw thee quietly enurned’, 1.4.27-43) becomes redundant in the filmic sense because it has already been visualised in the opening scene.

The function of this moment (the action of 44 lines in the play, 1.4-19-63) is to detach Hamlet from his followers and enable him to follow the Ghost. Thus the dialogue is reduced to the bare essentials and just 21 of the 44 lines are necessary.

There are now two final phases that are told in the

Lines retained
1.5 (114-115)
1.5 (9-11)
1.5 (13-16)
1.5 (22-23)
1.5 (25-28)
1.5 (35-36)
1.5 (38-43)
1.5 (45-46)
1.5 (58-64)
1.5 (74-76)
1.5 (78-91)
1.5 (95-99)
1.5 (102-109)
1.5 (111-113)

order they are in the play, with the exception of the followers calling Hamlet (see 1.5.114-115). These two phases contain two vital kernels of Shakespeare’s and Zeffirelli’s versions of the story – the revelation of the murder followed by Hamlet’s desire to commit Horatio and the guard to silence about what they have seen and his intention to put on ‘an antic disposition’. This first of these phases uses a series of close-ups and reaction shots, which have a dual function. First, the close-ups in a dark location

restrict the amount of visual data and this enables a greater focus on the words being spoken. Second, this section is regularly punctuated by Hamlet's reactions, which guide the audience. Although Keyishian notes that Gibson's Hamlet pursues the Ghost in an aggressive manner with his 'sword outward', the audience is also guided by his facial reactions when he sees the Ghost (00:26:09).²⁸⁵ As Hatchuel observes, the action/reaction format ('when the camera shows a character, and *then* this character's point of view) helps the spectators to empathise with Hamlet by identifying their own gaze with his whilst he is momentarily absent from the screen.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Keyishian in *ibid.* p. 77.

²⁸⁶ Hatchuel, p. 53.

Looking at this phase of the story from a structural point-of-view, one development is the goal that flows out of the Inciting Incident: to ‘revenge his foul and most unnatural murder’ (1.5.25). In other words, taking revenge will rebalance Hamlet’s life. To some degree this fits with McKee’s suggestion that at this point in the ‘classic’ Hollywood film a single protagonist identifies a ‘known object of desire’ and, clearly, Hamlet will know when he has killed Claudius.²⁸⁷ However, as Kristin Thompson points out, the typical Hollywood protagonist also has a tendency to ‘seek out goals and pursue them’, rather than allow things

to happen to them.²⁸⁸ In this sense Hamlet’s goal is not his own but one that has been delegated to him.²⁸⁹ The argument here is that in some sense this creates some of the internal conflict that makes Hamlet so fascinating a character: instead of merely carrying out the goal, he begins to conceive an elaborate plan to prove Claudius guilty prior to killing him. This intermediate goal causes the retardation of the main goal of revenge, despite Hamlet’s initial commitment to action (1.5.95-99). Tension is incorporated into this delay by the transtextual qualities of Gibson as the man of action for whom retardation is anathema. As can be seen from the lines retained (see inset box), Zeffirelli makes multiple small edits – using

Lines retained
1.5 (117-119)
1.5 (121)
1.5 (123-124)
1.5 (126-130)
1.5 (132)
1.5 (137-139)
1.5 (140-141)
1.5 (142)
1.5 (144)
1.5 (146)
1.5 (147-148)
1.5 (149)
1.5 (151)
1.5 (156)
1.5 (155)
1.5 (161-162)
1.5 (166-173)
1.5 (179-183)
1.5 (189-190)

43 of the 73 lines available. The most relevant structural factor is that Zeffirelli retains Hamlet’s decision to ‘put an antic disposition on’ (1.5.173). Almeriyeda

²⁸⁷ McKee, p. 138.

²⁸⁸ Thompson, p. 14.

²⁸⁹ This is not because main characters in early modern revenge tragedies were unable to conceive their own goals: Vindice in *Revenger’s Tragedy*, for example – albeit after a delay of nine years – sets his own goal to revenge the murder of Gloriana.

deletes this moment with a number of implications for structure and characterisation.

A number of aspects have now become clear. Zeffirelli changes the nature of the story from one of state politics to family politics through a combination of textual edits and shot choices that prioritise reactions over the words spoken. In addition a greater emphasis has been placed on Hamlet's passing love for Ophelia being a 'toy in blood' rather than focusing on the dangers that might be created by her having a relationship that violated social boundaries. Great emphasis has also been put upon narrative comprehensibility, with events linked via cause and effect and the spaces clearly delineated so that audience hypotheses about future events are focused on the content of the scene rather than the location.

Lastly, most of the focus in the film, as in the play, is suspense oriented; there is not a great focus on curiosity about the past. This is, in part a choice determined by the relatively short duration of Shakespearean plays and mainstream film. There is simply insufficient time to delve too deeply into the backstories of the characters in the way that can be seen routinely in mainstream TV. However, long-form TV programmes often have 50/60 episodes in which to do this (around 50 hours of viewing time): Shakespeare had approximately 3 hours and Zeffirelli just over 2 hours. With that proviso, the next step is to look at the next stage of the story – from the beginning of Act 2 to the Midpoint.

Act 2 to the Midpoint

In the first section of the film the initial scene was cut altogether and 60% of the Act was cut overall. What is immediately noticeable from the second section of

the film (broadly spanning 2.1-3.2) is that the opening scene is again cut and 68% of the section is cut overall.

HAMLET (1990)

	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	956	4690	1506	2941	10,093
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	0	1592	777	880	3249
<i>Percentage cut</i>	100%	66%	48%	70%	68%

Again, one area for investigation is what is cut and what are the reasons for those

Scene Intercutting from Act 2 to the Midpoint
4.5 (47-50)
2.2
3.1
2.2
3.2
2.2
3.2
3.1
3.2
3.1
3.2
3.3
3.2 (358-62)

cuts. Another line of enquiry is to look at the way the syuzhet is rearranged and the effects this has on the story. What is immediately apparent is that whilst Zeffirelli makes limited use of scenic intercutting in Act 1, he makes extensive use of it in the rest of the story (see inset box). Beginning with a few lines culled from 4.5. (Ophelia's song: 'Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day / All in the morning betime / And I a maid at your window / To be your Valentine', 4.5.47-50) he then regularly intercuts between 2.2, 3.1 and 3.2 and finally part of 3.3 before the Midpoint is

reached (3.2.358-62).²⁹⁰ The key point is that the function of this intercutting is to minimise retardation and to increase suspense and hypothesis generation.

For example, the beginning of this section demonstrates the emphasis Zeffirelli places on narrative cohesion by his decision to restrict retardation. Cutting 2.1 removes the despatch of Reynaldo to spy on Laertes – Zeffirelli presumably regards this as a satellite because it does not affect the progression of

²⁹⁰ There are only four more words from 3.2 used after this point – a repeat of line 3.2.363 – 'Now to my mother'.

the main plot, although it does diminish the theme of spying and Polonius's interfering nature. The second half of 2.1 (Ophelia's report of Hamlet visiting her) is dramatised to show the immediate effects of Hamlet's feigned madness. In contrast, Shakespeare retards this moment, with the stage audience waiting a further 289 lines to actually see Hamlet 'unbrac'd' (when he enters at 2.2 169) – albeit various characters report this in Shakespeare's narrative.

At a stroke this narrative strategy enables Zeffirelli to cut 191 lines from 2.1. In addition, the spying theme is further minimised by the cutting of 39 lines where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet to be briefed by Claudius and

Lines retained
2.2 (43)
2.2 (46)
2.2 (48-50)
2.2 (87-91)
2.2 (93-112)
2.2 (114-119)
2.2 (123-125)
2.2 (128-131)
2.2 (140)
2.2 (143)
2.2 (146-147)
2.2 (149-151)
2.2 (154-157)

Gertrude (2.1.1-39). Lastly, the elimination of the political theme (and the threat of Fortinbras) means that a further 26 lines from 2.1.59-86 can be cut. In contrast Zeffirelli makes use of our knowledge of schemata to short circuit this process and show Polonius meeting Claudius and Gertrude with the news that Hamlet is mad. When the classical model of filmmaking is used, audiences know that information will be missing and that gaps will need to be filled. This is normally achieved via the use of template schemata, which

'add information when it is absent and test for a proper classification of data'.²⁹¹

As Bordwell points out, viewers tend to make consequential connections – so they might reasonably assume that Polonius is running because his daughter, Ophelia, has passed on details of Hamlet's unusual behaviour; in addition, prototype schemata help viewers to identify that a man like Polonius (who likes to interfere and intervene) will want to take action having been told the news;

²⁹¹ Bordwell, pp. 34-5.

lastly, procedural schemata will suggest that this action is compositionally motivated (it is relevant to the story), and it is realistically motivated (someone would do this in the real world). Thus Zeffirelli's knowledge of what people know about films and stories helps to facilitate a cut of 256 lines whilst retaining narrative coherence. This might seem obvious, but a lack of connection between events makes it more difficult for viewers to fill in the narrative gaps.

Once this news of the supposed cause of the madness is revealed the next action needs to be taken and this opportunity follows immediately as Polonius takes it upon himself to intervene. A technique Zeffirelli uses here is the yoking together of dialogue from elsewhere and out of chronological order. Lines

Lines retained
2.2 (160-167)
2.2 (169)
2.2 (171)
2.2 (151)
2.2 (56-57)

2.2.151 and 2.2.56-57 are juxtaposed and added to the end of this section as a way of undercutting Polonius's attempt: in the film this makes it more apparent that Gertrude knows the real cause of the madness (Hamlet's father's death and her o'er hasty marriage). These are comments that are separated

in Shakespeare's syuzhet and their juxtaposition further cements the relationship between mother and son that will become increasingly important in this film. Polonius's plan to get at where the 'truth is hid' (2.2.158-9) is also cut, which again plays down the theme of secrecy and plays up familial relationships.

The next section (some 39 lines in the play) is here reduced

Lines retained
2.2 (174-180)
2.2 (182-188)
2.2 (191-199)
2.2 (206-7)
2.2 (199-202)
2.2 (210-213)

by only 7 lines and, with the exception of one interpolation (2.2.206-7: see inset box, left), is presented in the same order as the play. In terms of the narrative it is the first time that the audience has had an opportunity to evaluate the 'mad' Hamlet when he speaks, and this scene is most

notable for the performance and setting. Gibson's Hamlet is often distanced from the other characters by being positioned above them and he makes frequent use of stairs and steps: from his room he looked down as Claudius and Gertrude rode away from the castle (00:11:00 – 00:12:00); he observed Ophelia from the battlements (00:13:20 – 00:15:00); he stands above Horatio on the battlements (00:15:35); he looks down on Claudius' feasting 00:21:00); as the 'poor wretch' in the previous scene he is seen astride a balustrade above a main hall 00:39:55). Here Gibson's Hamlet, whilst discovered at ground level, distances himself from Polonius by climbing a set of ladders (00:41:17). To emphasise his rejection of Polonius he pushes the ladder away making him fall; Polonius is thus rebuffed verbally and physically by Hamlet the 'man of action'. This situation might be contrasted with the times on the battlement when he allows Horatio to join him and when he joins the Ghost. Thus height and stairs are used to delineate space carefully by Zeffirelli to emphasise separation and alienation (from one group) and connection (with another group).

Two scenes earlier, Polonius set up the idea of observing Hamlet and his

Lines retained
3.1 (40-46)
3.1 (57)
3.1 (91-102)
3.1 (104-112)
3.1 (116-118)
3.1 (119-120)
3.1 (130-133)
3.1 (135-139)
3.1 (142-148)
3.1 (167-172)
3.1 (187)

daughter and, in true mainstream fashion, this is now shown without delay (see inset box, left). In the play Shakespeare submits this event to significant retardation and sets up what Kristin Thompson describes as a 'dangling cause': 'information or action which leads to no effect or resolution until later in the film'.²⁹² Here Zeffirelli changes the order of the syuzhet significantly, jumping over 408 lines to bring Ophelia and Hamlet together so that Claudius and Polonius

²⁹² Thompson, p. 12.

can secretly observe Hamlet. Neil Taylor, as noted earlier, argues that Zeffirelli ‘cavalierly re-organizes the order of the text that remains, advancing and delaying speeches in a bewildering manner’.²⁹³ One interpretation of Taylor is that this is one such example of cavalier reorganisation. However, the argument here is that Zeffirelli’s decision is deliberate, reasoned, effective and far from bewildering. If procedural schemata are applied it is not unreasonable that the characters would choose to try and understand the source of Hamlet’s madness quickly and it makes the connection between Polonius’s plan and the act much clearer. This is a tenet of classical film making, as Thompson points out when she writes that ‘Hollywood favours unified narratives, which means most fundamentally, that a cause should lead to an effect and that effect in turn should become a cause for another effect, in an unbroken chain across the film’.²⁹⁴ Here the effect is not immediate but very near to being so – and much nearer than waiting more than 400 lines. The conclusion of this scene (which is not preceded by ‘To be or not to be’ and does not include Hamlet’s advice that Ophelia should ‘get thee to a nunnery’), is an early realisation by Claudius that it is not love that motivates Hamlet’s madness. This also links back to Gertrude’s recent remarks that it is more likely to be the marriage. As a result, the scene ends with another element of suspense: Claudius’s determination to send Hamlet to England, which is overheard by Hamlet and introduces this idea into the plot much earlier, prompting suspense about what this means and what he will do.

From a visual perspective the choice of shots at the beginning of this scene act to link Gertrude and Hamlet. The first sees her looking down as Claudius walks away towards Ophelia and Polonius (00:43:28); the second is a

²⁹³ Taylor in Davies and Wells, p. 192.

²⁹⁴ Thompson, p. 12.

shot of her alone (00:43:32); the third returns to an identically framed shot from her optical point-of-view (00:43:34); the fourth sees Hamlet (again) walking along a balcony (00:43:35); and lastly the next shot (00:43:41), although ostensibly from Hamlet's optical point-of-view, is optically identical to Gertrude's, although they stand in different places. The effect is to create a subtle connection between mother and son.

Another change of order can be found in the position of Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' speech, which now moves in two senses. First the film effectively positions it within 2.2, which in itself is not totally unprecedented. Ann

Lines retained
3.1 (58-90)

Thompson and Neil Taylor point out that this is its approximate position in Q1 and it is 'more logical' in many ways than its F/Q2 position.²⁹⁵ British theatre directors including Michael Benthall (1957), Tony Richardson (1969), Ron Daniels (1989), Matthew Warchus (1997), Trevor Nunn (2004) and Michael Boyd (2004) seem to have concurred, and all chose this option. In many ways this does make more sense but Zeffirelli gives it an extra twist and places it after Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia (Q1, Q2 and F place it before).²⁹⁶ This again seems logical, given that its placement after the scene with Ophelia (and post-overhearing Claudius) gives it more motivation. From a visual perspective, however, this is one of the least imaginative in the film. Set in an underground tomb, the style consists of close-ups to minimise visual disruption along with fairly heavy-handed shots of praying figures atop monuments and shots of a skeleton in a wall niche to illustrate mentions of death. It is functional but lacks the enterprise its syuzhet repositioning promises. This

²⁹⁵ Shakespeare, Thompson, and Taylor, p. 18.

²⁹⁶ William Shakespeare, Ann Thompson, and Neil Taylor, *Hamlet : the texts of 1603 and 1623*, (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), pp. 92-96.

outbreak of textual conservatism is probably linked to the fact it is an iconic soliloquy: it is the only one presented in its uncut form in the film and there is no significant use of film techniques to portray the character's inner life (no distortion of vision or sound for example). In fact, in a way the mise-en-scene and the delivery make it one of the most theatrical and self-conscious scenes in the film.

Having inserted a phase of 3.1, Zeffirelli then returns to 2.2 and Hamlet meets with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern outside the castle on a cliff top. This is

Lines retained
2.2 (218-221)
2.2 (235-239)
2.2 (243-252)
2.2 (257-258)
2.2 (262-265)
2.2 (267-271)
2.2 (272)
2.2 (273-276)
2.2 (279-280)
2.2 (284-305)
2.2 (353)

the audience's first sight of them because they are cut from 2.2.1-39. As discussed earlier, this means that their employment as Claudius's spies will need to be inferred by other means. This again points up the narrative coherence of Zeffirelli's film: in the exchange that follows in this scene (edited within speeches and chronologically – see inset) Hamlet deduces that they have been sent for. This is not an unreasonable assumption given that he has recently

overheard Claudius suggest that he needs to be sent to England. Adopting his transtextual, *Lethal Weapon* action-hero persona, he uses physical aggression to force their admission that they were sent for. This transition from meeting to uncovering their real motivation is dealt with gradually over 187 lines (218-305) in the play, but is accelerated here, using just 59 lines. The final line of dialogue, a greeting to the players – 'Masters, you are welcome to Elsinore' – is brought forward from 2.2.353 because 2.2.306-352 is cut (the discussion of the child players). This latter segment would appear to be (in Zeffirelli's estimation) a satellite event that is not essential to the plot.

The arrival of the players is kept in the chronological order of the play

Lines retained
2.2 (502-503)
2.2 (511)
2.2 (513-514)
2.2 (353 - REPEAT)
2.2 (358-362)

but the Pyrrhus, Priam and Hecuba speeches are all cut – helping to explain why 72% of Act 2 disappears (100% of 2.1 and 66% of 2.2). In fact, only five lines relating to the players are used at this point (six including the greeting at 2.2.353). On the

one hand this is surprising, given that the players' arrival forms part of a relevant kernel (because this event will shortly prompt Hamlet to take a decision that will affect a future plot development). However, the language expressing the stories of the ancient Greeks and Trojans is clearly regarded as a satellite. Given that comprehension of these stories requires prototype and template schemata related to the pattern of ancient stories, character types and the ability to forge interrelationships between these references and the idea of regicide, this cannot be taken for granted in a mainstream audience. In addition, there are the pragmatic considerations that the speeches of the First Player averages 84 words and are therefore completely unsuitable for a film that has – thus far – been designed along mainstream narrative lines.

Of primary visual interest at the end of this scene, from a narrative perspective, are three moments. The first is when Hamlet shouts 'We'll hear a play tomorrow', thus inserting Shakespeare's deadline (from 2.2. 513-14), or what Thompson calls a 'dangling cause' – where the audience is made aware of a delay between cause and effect. The second and third, however, differ from Shakespeare's strategy. As Hamlet asks 'who shall 'scape whipping' (00:57:25), a series of shots, from Hamlet's optical point-of-view, juxtapose Claudius and Gertrude with the words; this effectively provides a narrative that suggests their

guilt – a fact that is not overt in the play because they are not present on stage at this point. The other moment is where Hamlet, after admitting that he is only mad ‘north-north-west’, confirms his suspicions of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by secretly observing them reporting back to Claudius: again, with the optical point-of-view favouring Hamlet, the audience is led to hypothesise about the two supposed friends. Because of the cuts viewers are in the same position as Hamlet – they know that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have admitted being ‘sent for’, but this moment confirms their complicity and decreases the audience’s empathy with them.

As a result of the cuts to the First Player’s speech about Hecuba, Zeffirelli is also able to substantially reduce Hamlet’s next soliloquy (2.2.527-

Lines retained
2.2 (548)
2.2 (553-569)
2.2 (571-582)

582) and it becomes a reflection on his cowardice spurred by the interaction with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern rather than a reflection on the player’s emotive qualities. In the play there is some motivation for the soliloquy. Here the

reaction is more forced, not as well motivated, and provides a less obvious narrative link with the players. After all, if Hamlet hasn’t been emotionally moved by the First Player’s performance it is less clear why would he think the actors could move Claudius. The connection to ‘the play’s the thing’ insight therefore becomes, in the language of procedural schemata, more artistic than realistic. Viewers are perhaps more likely to conclude that this is here as a set piece, rather than as a natural reaction.

Having moved forward both the confrontation with Ophelia and the ‘to be or not to be’ soliloquy, the path is now clear to skip over time and straight to the play – again a cause leads to an immediate effect in the ‘unbroken chain’

favoured by Hollywood.²⁹⁷ The cuts here change the emphasis: in the play (3.2.1-83) Hamlet briefs the players with his ‘speak the speech’ advice, and then

Lines retained
3.2. (73-76) 3.2 (83) 3.2 (80)

reflects on the moral qualities of Horatio in the ‘thou art e’en such a man’ speech. In contrast, Zeffirelli’s Hamlet is pragmatic: he merely instructs Horatio to watch his father. This takes out two of the satellite events that give insight

into Hamlet’s character: on one level the missing events help viewers to understand his love for acting and the theatre; but on a more profound level they introduce the viewer to the qualities that Hamlet believes constitute the ideal man – someone who can suffer all ills patiently, who is not concerned by twists of Fate, someone who, in other words, embodies Stoic values. This is both revealing, relevant to all and a contrast to the other ‘ideal man’ in the play – Fortinbras. Here the narration eschews such concerns and accelerates towards the next kernel – the play-within-the-play.

The next section of this pivotal scene is then a montage of lines from

Lines retained
2.2. (379-381) 2.2 (383-384) 3.2 (89-96) 3.2 (84-86) 3.2 (98-99) 3.2 (101-117) 3.2 (118-120) 3.1 (122-128) 3.1 (129)

three scenes (2.2, 3.1 and 3.2 – see inset box, left). The first combination discusses Polonius playing Caesar and foreshadows his murder: on the basis that he will accidentally play the king in the closet scene and be murdered by the man seeking to unseat a tyrant. Here Zeffirelli imports lines from 2.2 to announce the players. The second set of lines returns to 3.2 (lines 84-86 and 98-99) and sees him reject both his stepfather’s and his

mother’s attempts at reconciliation. The third section combines lines from 3.2

²⁹⁷ Thompson, p. 12.

and 3.1 to allow Hamlet to mock Ophelia and uses lines that are taken from the ‘nunnery’ scene.

The play-within-the-play itself is then a highly truncated version (see inset box, below), using just 44 of the 115 lines available between 3.2.133-244

Lines retained
3.2 (133-138)
3.2 (139)
3.2 (143-146)
3.2 (159-163)
3.2 (168-169)
3.2 (182-183)
3.2 (204)
3.2. (202-203)
3.2 (209-217)
3.2 (219-221)
3.2 (223-224)
3.2 (239-241)
3.2 (245)
3.2 (247)
3.2 (246)
3.2 (244)

(including Q2 variations). During almost 5-minutes of screen time (01:04:53-01:09:40) Zeffirelli guides narrative comprehension not so much by the words used (in fact hardly at all), but more by the careful composition of matching shots that mirror the King and Queen with the Player King and Queen and then Claudius with Lucianus. Again the verbal subtlety is replaced with visual communication of the key event: the ensnaring of Claudius. In many ways the audience here plays the role of Horatio because, despite his careful briefing, they never see the play from his optical point-of-view. Hamlet’s instructions to

‘observe mine uncle’ guide the viewing; it is for viewers to conclude that Claudius is guilty on the basis of what they see. This, of course, was also Shakespeare’s intention, but the cinema allows the director greater scope to control what is seen and heard. As Davies points out, this highlights one of the major differences between the theatre, where everything is seen simultaneously, and the cinema where it is the director who controls ‘our perception and our thinking’.²⁹⁸

Having said that, both Shakespeare and Zeffirelli combine two classical storytelling techniques simultaneously here: suspense and dramatic irony. As

²⁹⁸ Davies in Davies and Wells, p. 8.

Robert McKee writes, suspense is generated when ‘the audience and the characters know the same information’. In contrast, dramatic irony is generated when ‘the audience knows more than the characters’ and the story then creates interest through concern for the main character.²⁹⁹ Here the audience knows the same as Hamlet (and will thus look for evidence of Claudius’s guilt), but knows more than Claudius and Gertrude (who are unaware of Hamlet’s plan). In the play this dynamic is about to change because Claudius now realises that Hamlet is a crisis that needs a rapid solution. This is one of the reasons that it is argued that this scene is the Midpoint of the story – both in the play and the film. Hamlet has the evidence he needs that Claudius is guilty – he has confirmed the Ghost’s allegation – and Claudius must now react to deal with the problem. In addition, when the play is formatted in *Final Draft* Claudius’s reaction occurs on page 88 of 168 (51% of the way through the story). In the film it happens after 68 of 129 minutes (53% of the way through the story).

The remaining action in this scene now focuses on closing off this line of action and setting up the issues for the second half of the story (3.2.249-362 – see inset box, below). Hamlet celebrates briefly, comparing notes with Horatio, followed by a restatement of the nunnery remarks to Ophelia whom Zeffirelli now isolates – she has been deserted by her father, Claudius and Gertrude. From a narrative perspective this helps to keep Ophelia in the minds of the audience and her confused reaction to Hamlet provides the first visual indications of her future madness. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come to Hamlet to tell him his mother wants to see him, thus creating the deadline for a meeting. Zeffirelli also includes the moment with the recorders, which is used here to reinforce the

²⁹⁹ McKee, p. 351.

transtextual violence that accompanies Gibson, as he pins Rosencrantz to the

Lines retained
3.2 (249-252)
3.2 (263-267)
3.1 (129) REPEAT
3.1 (128-9)
3.1 (139-40)
3.2 (272-280)
3.2 (252-253)
3.2 (289-290)
3.2 (292-294)
3.2 (285-287)
3.2 (298-300)
3.2 (308-310)
3.2 (322-324)
3.2 (327)
3.2 (329)
3.2 (333-337)
3.2 (339-340)
3.2 (352)
3.2 (355-356)
3.2 (358-362)

wall. This scene also functions to reinforce the fact that various agents of antagonism are ranged against Hamlet: including his mother at this point. The Midpoint then ends with Hamlet's commitment to action: the 'witching time' soliloquy. Zeffirelli ends this before the commitment to 'speak daggers to her but use none', again reinforcing the idea of action rather than reason.

Midpoint to the Second Act Turning Point

If the end of 3.2 is, as I suggest, the Midpoint (or climax in Freytag's terminology), it raises a critical issue in relation to the classical film model – the climax is in the 'wrong' place. In a classical film the protagonist would seek (for example) to uncover the identity of the murderer and then take decisive action at the end of the story – either unsuccessfully or successfully. Films such as *Chinatown* (1974) and *The Fugitive* (1993) demonstrate exactly this pattern. In other words, it would suggest that filmmakers working with the classical model would need to do some major reorganisation of the story to make it work for the

mainstream cinema. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, this led to the majority of Acts 4 and 5 of being cut from *Romeo and Juliet* and a similar pattern can be seen developing here (see Table below).

HAMLET (1990)

	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	788	1773	362	224	530	507	1586	284	1580	7634
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	172	1017	74	9	292	0	562	0	414	2540
<i>Percent cut</i>	78%	42%	80%	96%	45%	100%	65%	100%	74%	67%

Scenes 4.4 (Fortinbras) and 4.6 (the delivery of the pirates' letters) are cut

Scene Intercutting from the Midpoint to the 2 nd Act Turning Point	completely, whilst 4.2 (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern being accused of being sponges) is cut by 96%. In fact the major exceptions are 3.4 and 4.3 and it will come as no surprise that these are the scenes featuring the murder of Polonius and Hamlet's cross-examination of his mother followed by the scene where Hamlet is finally despatched to England; in other words two crucial kernels of the story. In terms of the way that the scenes are arranged, it is immediately clear that the tendency to intercut is intensified in this section, or as Cartmell puts it, the text is 'drastically cut and rearranged' (see inset box, left). ³⁰⁰
3.3	
3.4	
4.1	
4.2	
4.3	
3.3	
4.3	
3.4	
4.5	
4.3	
4.5	
4.7	

These rearrangements, combined with substantial cuts, propel the action forward more quickly and enable Zeffirelli to run several plot strands concurrently where Shakespeare runs them sequentially.

For example, looking at 3.3.1-35, the initial conversation between Claudius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about their 'commission' is delayed

³⁰⁰ Deborah Cartmell, 'Zeffirelli and Shakespeare' in Jackson, p. 223.

and Claudius's 36-line confession of his sins (3.3.36-72) is reduced to just 3 lines: 'O my offence is rank! It smells to heaven. / It hath the primal eldest curse

Lines retained
3.3 (36-38)
3.3 (73-78)
3.3 (86)
3.3 (79)
3.3 (87)
3.3 (89-90)
3.3 (93-95)
3.2 (362) REPEAT

upon't, / A brother's murder' (see inset box). This does contain the essence of the action but fails to highlight fully his internal conflict and why he cannot reform. The cuts also lessen the dramatic irony in the film when Hamlet then appears. In the play the audience knows that Claudius is struggling but Hamlet does not. In contrast, the film's

narration is merely an admission of murder and is much less complex; the cinema audience is never told that he committed the murder for power and for his brother's wife, and that he also knows that this is unforgivable for as long as he continues to covet those things. As a result, the reasons that Hamlet gives for not killing Claudius are outlined more clearly in the play; it is, therefore, a more critical kernel (or choice point) in the play than it becomes in the film.

However, the shortening of 3.3 does move the narration quickly to the

Lines retained
3.3 (31-32)
3.4 (5)
3.4 (6-7)
3.4 (5)
3.4 (5)
3.4 (6)
3.4 (8-35)
3.4 (38-41)
3.4 (43-44)
3.4 (50)
3.4 (52-54)
3.4 (59-70)
3.4 (70.8)
3.4 (72)
3.4 (78-86)
3.4 (89)

next deadline – Hamlet's meeting with his mother. In effect this scene falls into two sections (see inset box). The first is the section up until line 35, when Polonius is killed. This is, in many ways the first main outcome of Hamlet's discovery that Claudius is guilty of murder. Having wanted to kill Claudius in the chapel, his decisive reaction is to try and kill him now (unfortunately mistaking Polonius for the king – an ironic reference back to the fact Polonius played Julius Caesar at university). This act, incidentally, also gives the lie to the idea that Hamlet is terminally indecisive and is a

defence of casting Gibson the action hero. The tone of the story darkens here and life becomes much more serious for the character. It may not be surprising that this phase of 3.4 contain one of the longest sections of unedited dialogue in the film (3.4.8-35), with 27 lines. From a narrative perspective the most memorable aspect is described by Deborah Cartmell as the moment when Hamlet ‘all but rapes his mother, simulating sex with her on the bed’ in the so-called ‘closet scene’. This sexualisation of the relationship (already seen in Hamlet’s room at the beginning of the film) is mirrored in the final scene of the film where Close’s Gertrude dies after a series of ‘sexually suggestive jerking movements’.³⁰¹ The textual cuts again simplify the interaction, just drawing attention to the broad movement of his thoughts by focusing on phrases such as: ‘calls virtue hypocrite ... makes marriage vows as false as dicers’ oaths ... look her upon this picture ...

Lines retained	assurance of a man ... eyes without feeling ... O shame, where is thy blush? ... enseamed bed’.
3.4 (92-96)	<p>The dynamic of the scene changes with the Ghost returning (from 3.2.92, see inset box, left) to remind him that the revised goal – one that Hamlet is now committed to – is being forgotten and that Hamlet must refocus on the revenge plot. The remaining action is merely to reassure the Ghost, to convince his mother that he is not mad, and to persuade her to keep her distance from Claudius. As the body of Polonius is dragged out (after 3.4.191), the questions are all suspense orientated: what will happen next</p>
3.4 (99-103)	
3.4 (105-109)	
3.4 (113)	
3.4 (115-116)	
3.4 (122-126)	
3.4 (128)	
3.4 (132-133)	
3.4 (135-137)	
3.4 (140-143)	
3.4 (147-150)	
3.4 (155-158)	
3.4 (160-164)	
3.4 (165-172)	
3.4 (181-183)	
3.4 (187-191)	

³⁰¹ Cartmell in *ibid.* p. 219.

and will Gertrude keep her word? From a textual perspective Zeffirelli not only keeps 58% of the words in this scene, he also runs it in chronological order:³⁰² in other words, this key kernel of the Shakespearean syuzhet is kept in its original position and also in its original order – albeit with numerous inter-speech edits.

The questions posed by the previous scene – what will happen next and

Lines retained
4.1 (3-7)
4.1 (10-12)
4.1 (32-33)

will Gertrude keep her word to Hamlet and conceal the reasons for his supposed madness? – are answered immediately in the Shakespearean syuzhet and in the film.

Claudius immediately discovers the crime and sets people to

find Hamlet and the body. The answer to the second question is that Glenn Close as Gertrude quickly pockets an image of her first husband that Hamlet has given her and then plays up Hamlet's madness – this suggests that she made the choice to side with her son, not her husband. One major difference between the play and the film is that, in the latter, the text is heavily cut to place more emphasis on

Lines retained
4.2 (2)
4.3 (1)
4.3 (3-4)
4.3 (11-13)
4.3 (17-21)
4.3 (26-39)
4.3 (41-42)
4.3 (45-54)
4.3 (56)
3.3 (2-4)
3.3 (24)
4.3 (59)
4.3 (64-66)

action (see inset box above showing that just 10 lines are retained from scene 4.1 out of the 44 that are available – including Q2 variants).

What now happens in the Shakespearean syuzhet (scenes 4.2 and 4.3) is a degree of retardation as Hamlet is questioned and pursued (4.2) and then questioned further (4.3). Zeffirelli cuts the text (see inset box, left) and converts much of this to action whilst positioning Claudius as a politician managing his courtiers (4.3.1 and 4.3.3-4), rather than

³⁰² One brief exchange (3.4.183-15) is displaced to later in the film, but otherwise is contained within this one scene.

speaking in soliloquy. He despatches Hamlet to England and, using imported lines from 3.3 (2-4 and 24) tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he will give them their commission. The final action of the scene, this time delivered in soliloquy, is to announce his plan for the ‘present death of Hamlet’ in England. At this point Zeffirelli also shows the letters that contain the command to kill Hamlet – important visual information that will be used in a future scene.

Lastly, and again in line with mainstream narrative practice, there is immediate evidence of Claudius’s plan being enacted; this, of course, could be achieved by a stage director using scene 4.4 and including the Fortinbras subplot.

Lines retained
3.4 (183-184)
3.4 (185.1-185.5)
3.4 (185.7-185.8)

This option is not open to Zeffirelli and so he repositions an exchange taken from F and Q2 between Hamlet and his mother from 3.4.183-185.8 (see inset box). Hamlet speaks with her and checks that she knows he must go to England.

This short scene (01:26:35 – 01:27:35) achieves three important narrative goals: the first is to utilise verbal redundancy to remind the audience about Hamlet’s destination, because he will be ‘disappearing’ from the screen for 11 of the next 13 minutes. The second is to reinforce his relationship with his mother with a repetition of the kiss of the first scene (00:10:00), but this time initiated by Hamlet – an overt signal of his forgiveness. Thirdly, it reminds the viewer of Hamlet’s distrust of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when he says he will foil their plans – ‘But I will delve one yard below their mines / And blow them at the moon.’ (3.2.185.7-8). All three of these acts (plus the recent sight of Claudius’s letters) set up actions that will soon occur – the exchange of letters on the ship, the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in England, and Zeffirelli’s choice to have Gertrude merely watch Claudius’s dispute with Laertes rather than

intervene (as she does in the play). Again, this is evidence of Zeffirelli carefully constructing the syuzhet with the very specific aim of clarifying the narrative, and suggests that this is not a confusing rearrangement of the text.

Following a shot of a ship at sea the action moves its focus to the story of Ophelia's mental collapse. These scenes present a difficult character development for the actress playing Ophelia (Helena Bonham-Carter); she has to

Lines retained
4.5 (23-26)
4.5 (59-64)
4.5 (17-22)
4.5 (29-32)
4.5 (65)
4.5 (40-43)
4.5 (66-69)
4.5 (80-81)
4.5 (69-71)
4.5 (61-64) REPEAT
4.5 (73-75)

go from apparently sane when last seen (3.2.229) to insane (4.5.21) on her appearance here. Applying realistic schemata this is unlikely, and may be a barrier to a mainstream audience being able to believe such a move. One of the upshots of Zeffirelli rearranging the syuzhet is that he has made this issue more manageable. By placing her argument with Hamlet in the Q1 position (00:44:00 in the film) and then displacing the 'nunnery' remarks to the play-within-the-play scene, Bonham-Carter has the opportunity to develop gradually from nervousness via distress to madness (see 01:10:00). These factors – the double assault from Hamlet, plus the death of her father – help to prepare the audience for the sight of the 'mad' Ophelia on the battlements and make this scene more believable. One narrative function of the visuals that adds to these scenes is that Ophelia is filmed below a central tower with walkways leaving it at a variety of angles; this reinforces the sense of a mind distressed; in addition, Zeffirelli chooses to shoot Gertrude walking away from Claudius, leaving him spatially isolated at the end of the scene. A further point to note is that despite the relative paucity of dialogue these two adjacent scenes last six minutes (01:27:35

– 01:33:45). This might seem surprising but the narrative here shows the ramifications of both Hamlet’s and Claudius’s behaviour – the impact on the life of someone who, in this setting, is powerless. In addition, Ophelia inserts a dangling cause – that her brother Laertes will hear of her father’s death.

A music bridge then links a shot of Ophelia being carried away with a

Lines retained
4.3 (65-66) REPEAT

shot of Hamlet’s ship at sea. This scene dramatises the moment when Hamlet silently retrieves the papers (related after the fact in the play at 5.2.16-63), whilst

Claudius’s instructions that he desires ‘The present death of Hamlet’ (4.3.66) are heard in voice-over (see inset box) – another redundant use of this information to make sure the audience remembers Hamlet’s supposed fate; this is followed by the beheading of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, building on Hamlet’s comments to his mother that he will foil their plan (see 4.5.185.1-185.8). This justifies Zeffirelli’s positioning of the latter piece of information as Hamlet left the castle.

The setting also assists with the device of the letter swap: using procedural

Lines retained
4.5 (108)
4.5 (112-113)
4.5 (120)
4.5 (124)
4.5 (131-132)
4.5 (136-139)
4.5 (140)
4.5 (145-150)
4.5 (173-174)
4.5 (177-181)
4.5 (158-159)

schemata a viewer might reasonably conclude that a letter from a king can be relatively easily forged by a prince; it is also conceivable that the king of England would have carte blanche to put Hamlet’s former friends to death without due process of law.³⁰³

This is swiftly followed by the return of Laertes, in the second half of scene 4.5 (see inset box, left), who confronts Claudius and demands to know how his father

³⁰³ Denmark was to some degree democratic at this point in history, but this is not something that the viewer is made overtly aware of in this version of the story.

died. Claudius manages to calm him and says that Laertes will discover that he is not guilty of the crime. In this scene – whose basic function is to bolster the forces of antagonism facing Hamlet – Zeffirelli's Gertrude does not intervene to protect Claudius and Laertes' anger is assuaged solely by the king. This narrative change makes the king seems stronger but also acts to separate Gertrude further from her husband. Ophelia then returns and the sight of her distracts Laertes and dampens from his anger towards the king.

Lines retained
4.7 (137-140)
4.7 (142-156)

After a brief cutaway another moment of textual description is dramatised: this time where Ophelia runs outside the castle walls to a river: Gertrude, in voice-over and then in person (4.7.137ff), announces Ophelia's death by drowning, bringing the second act to a close.

Second Act Turning Point to Climax

	5.1	5.2	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	2254	3148	5402
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	525	868	1393
<i>Percentage cut</i>	77%	72%	74%

Similarly to *Romeo + Juliet*, 74% of the three final scenes is cut – further supporting Russell Jackson's observation that 'the opening and closing sections of the plays seem to be most problematic' leading to the compression of events from 'around act four' and 'towards the end' of the film versions.³⁰⁴ Again the question is what is cut, why, and what effect does this have on the story?

³⁰⁴ Jackson, p. 31.

One very significant development is the integration of scene 4.7 throughout Act

Scene Intercutting from the Second Act Turning Point to the Climax
5.1
4.5
5.1
4.7
5.2
4.7
5.2

5. As will become clear, this scene contains all of the plotting by Claudius and Laertes and it functions to keep suspense at a maximum until the very end of the story. The play, by way of contrast, sets up the poisoning plot in 4.7 with the result that the narrative emphasis in Act 5 falls on dramatic irony – the audience knows what Hamlet is facing but he does not. Suspense as a narrative technique, as

mentioned earlier, tends to be used more frequently in the mainstream cinema storytelling, thus helping to explain Zeffirelli's decision.

Zeffirelli makes many inter-speech cuts but at this stage of the story they are far more extensive. Out of the first 180 lines of scene 5.1 just 53 are used (see insert box below). The conversation between the gravediggers (1-57) is lost (on

Lines retained
5.1 (58-60)
5.1 (66-67)
5.1 (107-109)
5.1 (112)
5.1 (119-126)
5.1 (130-131)
5.1 (136-143)
5.1 (151-152)
5.1 (154)
5.1 (159-162)
5.1 (165)
5.1 (162-164)
5.1 (166-180)

the subject of the morality of burying rich suicides in hallowed ground, whilst poor suicides are buried in unhallowed ground). Reflections on the death of the members of contemporary society who follow ambition are lost, such as politicians (70-74), courtiers (76-85), and lawyers (90-105) – as are the reflections on the deaths of great leaders (187-199). As such these are satellites rather than kernels and are dispensable. They enrich experience but are not strictly necessary to the progression of the plot.

The scene effectively begins at line 119 when Hamlet is made to quibble over whose grave it is – the irony being that it is Ophelia's, although he fails to make the connection at this point. He does contemplate his youth and the looming

presence of death when he looks at Yorick's skull, although this is truncated. Nevertheless, at least some level of reflection on death is retained by Zeffirelli.

The setting works effectively when applying procedural schemata: Hamlet is riding back to the castle when he sees the gravedigger. The way that he found his way home off the ship is never explained because the letters are never sent or received by Horatio or the king (4.6 is cut completely as is 4.7.36-54). This might be a hole in the plot in another setting but it is argued here that it is taken for granted because, in what appears to be a non-bureaucratic storyworld, a reasonable working hypothesis is that there are no customs officers checking passports. In addition, as the son of a king – not to mention the transtextual attributes of action-man Mel Gibson – he could get passage home. In other words, Zeffirelli again relies on the audience's use of schemata to fill these narrative gaps so that attention can be focused on what will happen next. When Hamlet arrives at the graveside a mainstream audience would not have a particular problem with the idea of a grave being here. It is clear that people might be buried near the castle site and that Ophelia would not be buried in the tomb seen at the beginning of the film because she is not royal. It is also feasible that the grave might be near a path because of access: all of these factors offer an easy explanation for why Hamlet might pass the gravedigger. The argument here is that the setting has a fundamental role to play when applying such schemata.

The link to the arrival of the burial party in this location is thus realistic within the setting of this storyworld (beginning at 5.1.200 – see inset box below). The need for letters announcing Hamlet's arrival is also unnecessary (for the reasons given in the previous paragraph) and the surprise will prompt Claudius to respond and this makes his plans sound more spontaneous. However, it is

noticeable that Zeffirelli regards Hamlet and Laertes leaping into a grave

Lines retained
5.1 (200-201)
5.1 (221-223)
5.1 (227-230)
5.1 (233-234)
4.5 (156-157)
5.1 (243)
5.1 (245-249)
5.1 (250)
5.1 (254-256)
5.1 (259)
5.1 (273)
5.1 (275-278)

unbelievable in this context. From a textual perspective, it is clear that sizeable cuts are made to the scene (see inset box, left); these mainly affect Laertes and delete his comments about burial rites, which seem to be unnecessary for a mainstream audience, along with Hamlet's comments about eating crocodiles, drinking eisel and Mount Ossa. The one seeming anomaly (an insert from scene 4.5) is a one-liner describing Ophelia ('O rose of May'). As a result of these

cuts only 29 lines of the 78 available are used here.

As discussed earlier, suspense is now generated by moving part of 4.7 to follow 5.1 (see inset box, below). Claudius uses the arrival of Hamlet at the graveside as the catalyst for the plot to kill him – as opposed to the arrival of the

Lines retained
4.7 (57-59)
4.7 (5-7)
4.7 (9)
4.7 (11-16)
4.7 (18)
4.7 (89-93)
4.7 (96-98)
4.7 (100)
4.7 (95.5-95.6)
4.7 (61-66)

letters. What is clear is that Hamlet's arrival in Denmark is the crucial kernel of the story here, not the particular delivery mechanism. Again, substantial cuts are made possible by the fact that much of this section concerns the letters and a lengthy speech on the reasons why Claudius was unable to act more harshly against Hamlet. In fact only 31 of the 126 lines available from F and Q2 are used here.³⁰⁵

In contrast to almost every other scene to-date, the dialogue is not presented in the chronological order that Shakespeare wrote it (see inset box above). When the detail is examined it becomes clear that this looseness benefits the scene – adding a sense of spontaneity. Of course there may be concerns that the emotions

³⁰⁵ A further two lines (4.7.53-55) are used later in the film.

in this scene might now be inappropriate because of it being moved later in the syuzhet. I would argue that this is not the case. At the beginning Claudius is trying to assuage Laertes's anger. In its original position in the Shakespearean syuzhet this anger was engendered by the death of his father and the sight of his sister run mad; this motivation is still relevant if not more so, because he has been challenged and insulted at his sister's graveside. Likewise, Claudius's explanation of why he failed to take effective action against Hamlet is still valid: a combination of his love for Gertrude and the general popularity of Hamlet. Claudius tests Laertes' resolve and then suggests that he has a plot in mind, but does not mention what this might be. This 'dangling cause' gives the viewer enough information to hypothesise about what this plot might be and pushes our attention forward as Zeffirelli creates suspense. In contrast, Shakespeare at this point mentions both of the poisoning plots in one continuous scene. This makes Act 5 of Shakespeare's syuzhet dominated by dramatic irony: not the recommended form for the end of a mainstream film driving towards a climax

The revelation that a plot is hatching then becomes the immediate background to the invitation to a fencing bout (from 5.2.82 – see inset box below): the audience knows that there is a plot but what is it? How does this fit with fencing? Zeffirelli also reduces the amount of retardation that Shakespeare had introduced. Between the revelation of the poisoning plot (4.7.113ff in Shakespeare) and the fencing bout (5.2.162ff) there is the long gravedigger's scene (5.1.1-200) and the burial of Ophelia (5.1.200-284), followed by an extensive explanation of how Hamlet escaped and the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (5.2.1-81). In addition, Shakespeare retards the action further by introducing a long 'invitation' scene with Osric and a second lord (5.2.82-147).

In contrast Zeffirelli retards the details of Claudius's plot and accelerates the action by cutting the text (using just 32 of the 133 lines available from F and Q2).

Lines retained
5.2 (82-83)
5.2 (90-95)
5.2 (99-100)
5.2 (102.2)
5.2 (102.26)
5.2 (102.31-102.32)
5.2 (108)
5.2 (122-125)
5.2 (130-133)
5.2 (146.7-146.8)
5.2 (147-151)
5.2 (155)
5.2 (157)

However, it is noticeable that the pattern of chronological telling within the section is restored (see inset box, left). In summary, there's more of a focus on suspense and forward momentum in Zeffirelli's syuzhet and a greater degree of regular contact with the various plotlines compared to Shakespeare's version. In contrast, the Shakespearean syuzhet provides a sense that Fate is taking over events, because the extended amount of

time that has elapsed provides a sense that events are fixed.

Lines retained
4.7 (128)
4.7 (130-131)
4.7 (133)
4.7 (112-114)
4.7 (118-120)
4.7 (53-55)

Zeffirelli then reverts to the second half of scene 4.7 (from line 128, see inset box, left), giving the impression that the poisoning plan is being worked out *after* the invitation to fight: as noted earlier, this makes the action more immediate, spontaneous and pacy. In addition, in the

Shakespearean syuzhet Claudius initially suggests that Laertes should stab Hamlet. The poisoning idea is added by Laertes and then developed by Claudius. Here the order is reversed: Claudius suggests the poisoning first (128, 130-31 and 133) and this prompts Laertes to think of poisoning the blade. Thus the focus is placed – at the very last moment – on poisoning, with the burden of responsibility resting with Claudius as the initiator.

Although it may seem peculiar, given the drive towards the climax, there is then a moment of quiet and reflection before the final confrontation. Viewers

know that there is a poisoning plot and that Hamlet looks doomed to die. Yet here there is the opportunity, as in the Shakespearean syuzhet, to see him

Lines retained
5.2 (157-160)

embrace his fate with the words ‘the readiness is all’. This sense of quiet is mentioned by Lajos Egri, who uses the metaphor of a storm to describe the idea of conflict in

stories building gradually, until one reaches the lull before the storm. In that last moment the decision is made, and the storm either moves on or breaks in all its fury.³⁰⁶ Robert McKee adds that at the moment of crisis before the climax the protagonist ‘will be face to face with the most focused, powerful forces of antagonism’ and be faced with a dilemma; a choice between two things that are both wanted by the protagonist but cannot be attained.³⁰⁷ Here Shakespeare has designed such a moment – Hamlet has a choice and has chosen to accept his Fate and Zeffirelli respects it.

The final preparations for the fencing match then follow immediately

Lines retained
5.2 (162-164)
5.2 (177)
5.2 (179-181)
5.2 (183-184)
5.2 (188-191)
5.2 (197-200)
5.2 (204-206)
5.2 (209)
5.2 (213-216)

(5.2.162-216, see inset box, left) with Hamlet asking for forgiveness from Laertes – a wish that is partially granted. The King announces that he will drink to Hamlet if he wins the first or second bouts: thus setting up the poisoning. This section is just 2m 30s long and, although it is shortened by inter-section textual cuts (see inset box,

left), the story is told in the same order as the Shakespearean original.

³⁰⁶ Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing : Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives*, (London: Touchstone, 2004). p.180.

³⁰⁷ McKee. p. 303-304

The climax of the film is then 12 minutes in duration and involves a long and complex fight scene with just 57 lines used out of the 183 theoretically available (5.2.220-303) see inset box, below).³⁰⁸ The events in the film come to a

Lines retained
5.2 (220-221)
5.2 (223-230)
5.2 (232)
5.2 (233-234)
5.2 (236-237)
5.2 (243-244)
5.2 (246-247)
5.2 (251-252)
5.2 (254-257)
5.2 (259-261)
5.2 (250)
5.2 (271-273)
5.2 (263-264)
5.2 (266-269)
5.2 (275-276)
5.2 (278-282)
5.2 (286-291)
5.2 (294-295)
5.2 (300)
5.2 (302-303)

head in the same order as the play apart from a couple of lines that are slightly reordered. But in contrast to the play Zeffirelli uses the camera to place an enhanced focus on Gertrude. She has very little to say – just 36 words, slightly reduced from the 53 words she has in the play. However, she features in 57 separate shots that trace the tragic trajectory of the scene. At first (01:53:08) she exchanges affectionate looks with Hamlet, signalling their ongoing reconciliation; her reactions to the initial stages of the fight show a mother's concern for her son's life (01:55:50); Hamlet's wink (01:57:00) reassures her as the fight develops in his favour; Gertrude kisses Hamlet for

(what the audience knows will be) the final time after taking the fateful draught of poison (01:58:39); a series of shots (beginning at 01:59:57) visualise the growing effects of the poison on Gertrude, with the touching of her ear recalling the poisoning of Old Hamlet; finally she has the silent realisation (02:00:17) that Claudius has poisoned the drink, followed by the agony of being rendered temporarily mute by the poison and being unable to warn Hamlet of the threat; the relationship between Hamlet and his mother then comes to a well-resolved mainstream end as, following her death, he places his head on her chest (02:02:17) – mother and son finally united.

³⁰⁸ These lines do not include the further 44 that would have featured Fortinbras at the end of the play.

The most notable textual change in the final scene is decision to end the film with the words ‘And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest’ (5.2.302-3). The remaining 44 lines, where Fortinbras arrives and Horatio promises to recount what has happened, are cut.

The upshot of this is that the kingdom does not fall to Fortinbras and the political aspect of the play becomes unimportant. Here the story becomes one of familial intrigue and tension that destroys the family unit, but it does not have the overt political message of Shakespeare’s text, laced as it is with warnings about the dangers of ambition and immoral rule. As observed earlier, the opening and closing shots illustrate this sense of a closed world as the narration becomes more self-conscious. The opening and closing shots are virtually static: where soldiers and the general populace were immobile in the opening, the courtiers all remain rooted to the spot at the end. Only Horatio moves slightly and no-one is near the king or queen. It seems like a world that has been activated by the presence of the narration and as the camera moves upwards this world returns to immobility. This choice draws attention to the artifice of the process – even at the end of a film that has been so rooted in the idea of the objectivity of the camera and the use of the conventional tools of classical Hollywood storytelling techniques.

CONCLUSION

What is clear from this chapter is that Zeffirelli makes substantial changes to the fabula of *Hamlet*, but it is the ways in which syuzhet and style interact that are of particular interest. For example, it is clear that macro-changes, such as deleting Fortinbras, change the story from one with a state-political focus, to a family

crisis. However, it is the subtle reorganisations of the syuzhet that offer the greatest insight. Sub-dividing the early scenes into separate locations (see 1.2) reinforces the family-orientation of the story but, at the same time, acts subtly to bind mother and son together. One example is the way that Gertrude's request that Hamlet stay in Denmark is made in private between her and Hamlet; this means that not only is she not seen to intervene publicly (because of the location change) but she also does not overtly challenge her husband's authority even in front of her son. This reluctance to intervene can also be seen in a later scene when she does not step between Claudius and Laertes – in other words these are subtle changes of behaviour that emerge by virtue of a close reading of the text alongside the film.

Another factor that emerges from this syuzhet arrangement is the eroticisation of the relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet. This begins with a kiss on the lips in private but eventually finds public expression in the courtyard as Hamlet leaves for England – thus demonstrating her overt commitment to Hamlet rather than to Claudius. Her closeness to Hamlet is also subtly communicated by the optical point-of-view shot that they share prior to the 'remembrances of your that I have longèd long to redeliver' scene with Ophelia.

In terms of the overall coherence of the structure, Zeffirelli's syuzhet is organised to maximise narrative coherence and to answer viewer hypotheses as quickly as possible. One example is the dramatisation of Ophelia's meeting with the 'mad' Hamlet whilst she is sewing. Following her report of this in the play, at the end 2.1, there is a slight delay until 2.2.48-49, whilst Claudius and Gertrude greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to get the 'spying' plot underway. In the film Polonius immediately runs into the great hall and announces the source of

Hamlet's madness. It is for the audience to make the connection that Ophelia must have told him and to conclude (on the basis of what has been seen to-date) that he is the sort of person who would do such a thing.

A similar strategy is employed with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: in the film they are not seen being briefed to spy – the audience must hypothesise about their role and find out the truth at the same time as Hamlet (a common storytelling strategy in the mainstream cinema). Another difference is Zeffirelli's manipulation of suspense: this becomes particularly obvious with the integration of various stages of the poisoning plot (4.7) into Act 5. This maintains tension until the very end, whereas Shakespeare's *syuzhet* uses dramatic irony to emphasise the role of Fate.

Reflecting on the textual cutting strategy and the arrangement of the *syuzhet*, what also becomes apparent is that there is a great deal of inter-speech cutting; thus the decision to show the lines retained in each section is partly designed as a resource that might allow the reader to explore what language is cut and to explore what Shakespeare's language is offering that is not replicated visually.

Finally, in terms of the *syuzhet* rearrangement, whilst there are substantial changes, any suggestion that such changes are bewildering or directionless is, arguably, incorrect. This *syuzhet* is constructed carefully and is extremely coherent from a narrative perspective. Looking back at the key events identified earlier, Zeffirelli retains many of them:

1. The sighting of the Ghost by Horatio and the decision to tell Hamlet (1.1)
2. **Gertrude's decision to request that Hamlet stays in Denmark (1.2)**
3. **The decision by Polonius to restrict Ophelia's access to Hamlet (1.3)**

- 4. Hamlet's decision to put on an 'antic disposition' (1.5)**
- 5. The decision to send Hamlet to England (3.3)**
- 6. Hamlet's decision NOT to kill Claudius in the Chapel because the latter is praying and would thus go to Heaven rather than to Hell**
- 7. Hamlet's decision to kill the person behind the arras, which happened to be Polonius but might have been Claudius (3.4)**
- 8. Claudius's decision to have Hamlet executed (4.3)**
9. The announcement of Hamlet's return to Denmark (4.6)
- 10. Hamlet's decision to announce his presence at the graveside (5.1)**
- 11. Hamlet's decision to accept the challenge to fight Laertes (5.2)**
- 12. Hamlet's decision to kill Claudius**

In terms of the satellites, Zeffirelli decides to keep two of the seven noted here:

1. Claudius's decision to deal with the threat from Fortinbras (1.2)
2. Polonius sending Reynaldo to spy on Laertes (2.1)
- 3. The arrival of the players (2.2)**
4. Hamlet meeting the forces of Fortinbras on the plain (4.4)
- 5. Hamlet's discussion with the gravediggers (5.1)**
6. Hamlet's decision to leap into the grave and fight Laertes (5.1)
7. Fortinbras assuming control of Denmark (5.2)

What is also noticeable is that the events – although reorganised to a degree – are presented largely in the broad chronological order that Shakespeare wrote them in. For example, Zeffirelli does not, as some film-makers do, take scenes from one of the main turning points (often the Second Act-Turning Point or the Climax) and insert it at the beginning to build anticipation and suspense.

Examples of this technique might include *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), or more recently, *The Usual Suspects* (1995) or *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). This technique is also often used in television programmes where the opening scene is taken from an exciting moment in the future and the rest of the episode is told in flashback until the story catches up with this moment. The technique prompts hypotheses such as how did this character get into this situation? This subject is raised here because Zeffirelli's changes are not as radical as this and one goal of the next chapter, which focuses on Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) is to determine whether Almereyda – as a more experimental type of filmmaker – is more adventurous in this respect.

CHAPTER FIVE

HAMLET (2000)

Background

Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) is the antithesis of Zeffirelli's big budget production. Set in contemporary New York, and shot quickly on Super 16, it is more aligned with art-house cinema than the mainstream. The film was partially inspired by Finnish director Aki Kaurismaki's *Hamlet goes Business* (1987), in which Hamlet and Claudius are temporally relocated into modern life and struggle for control of a toy factory; with Claudius wanting to turn the company into the world's leading manufacturer of rubber ducks.³⁰⁹ A reference to this can be seen in Almereyda's film, where one of the gifts Ophelia returns to Hamlet is a rubber duck (in the equivalent of Act 3 Scene 1). Harry Keyishian sees Almereyda building upon Kaurismaki's modernising idea, arguing that the film is a 'media-savvy, self-reflexive "indie" take' on the play.³¹⁰ He also argues for the central role that the city of New York plays in the film, almost as an additional character itself. He quotes Douglas Lanier's observation that Almereyda's *film noir* homage helps to create an 'oppressive, urban night-world' of 'neon, chrome and asphalt' and a sense of 'systematic corruption, surveillance, and violence behind a façade of benign normalcy'.³¹¹

Samuel Cowl also regards the film as a type of modernisation, arguing that it is an attempt to 'see how Shakespeare can speak to the present moment, how they can speak to each other' and that Almereyda's treatment is both

³⁰⁹ Harry Keyishian, 'Shakespeare and movie genre' in Jackson, p. 80.

³¹⁰ Keyishian in *ibid.* p. 75.

³¹¹ Keyishian in *ibid.* p. 81.

‘radical and daring’.³¹² He adds that this is also a Hamlet that is heavily cut – ‘without 60 percent of the text’. In fact (as detailed later in this chapter) approximately 71 percent of the text was cut. This figure is not markedly in excess of the scale of cuts made by Zeffirelli, who cut 67 per cent of *Hamlet*, or Luhrmann who cut 68% of *Romeo and Juliet*, but is substantially more in actual words – the implications of which will also be discussed later. One of the film’s most arresting features, according to Crawl, is its ‘metacinematic awareness’, with Hamlet using a ‘pixel camera’ to visually diarise the sleek world of corporate America occupied by Claudius.³¹³ But it is a diary that is much more than a simple visual record and is a metaphor for the ‘fractured and tormented state of Hamlet’s soul and imagination’.³¹⁴ In fact, Crawl writes, ‘Technology is everywhere: television screens blink with violence in the background of many shots’. Hamlet carries his camera everywhere, making and editing home movies; there is extensive use of security cameras; Ophelia wears a ‘wire’ for her ‘longèd long to redeliver’ speech; Ophelia’s death is communicated by phone; Hamlet’s letter is delivered by fax; the letter to England is discovered on a laptop; the Mousetrap play-within-the-play is a video directed by Hamlet (a home movie mixing childhood footage, old-fashioned American movies, art-house imagery and pornography); and Hamlet delivers ‘To be or not to be’ from a Blockbuster video store.³¹⁵

The imagery of the film is often juxtaposed ironically with the words. In the opening sequence excerpts from Hamlet’s ‘What a piece of work is a man’ speech (from 2.2.293f) is set against Man as destroyer and despoiler, using shots

³¹² Crawl, p. 192.

³¹³ Ibid. pp. 195-7.

³¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 194-5.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p. 191.

of bombings and Stealth aircraft: the imagery mirroring the destructive secrecy used by Claudius to steal power. It is, in fact, a film so saturated by media images that Almereyda received criticism for his apparent embrace of corporate branding; which was ironic because Almereyda did not receive any contributions for product placement and actually paid certain brands to use their logos. In fact, the idea that is conveyed is that advertising is a vehicle for enslavement not emancipation – an interpretation that clearly some people missed. This freedom to repurpose brands for his own devices is used to facilitate the Ghost's disappearance into a Pepsi One vending machine (casting the brand as the gate to purgatory) and sees Hamlet speaking his 'To be or not to be' soliloquy in the aisles of Blockbuster video, surrounded by action titles. Almereyda finds (in Crowl's view) a parallel between the crush and visual overload of modern life and the stifling familial claustrophobia affecting Hamlet and Ophelia. The feeling of constant surveillance is emphasised by the ever-present sense of video cameras, CCTV recordings, and the taping of private conversations. Elvis Mitchell in the *New York Times* wrote that:

To develop the distrust and miscommunication -- a contemporary spin on the Shakespearean theme of people being out of touch with their natural environments -- bits of dialogue are filtered through other sources, like overheard phone conversations. Mr. Almereyda's use of technology is fascinating and well thought out; Hamlet's dead father (Sam Shepard), for example, is first glimpsed on video screens. Hamlet's 'get thee to a nunnery' speech to Ophelia becomes an unrelenting tantrum; it follows

her home and continues to attack her when she turns on her answering machine.³¹⁶

Almeryda acknowledges that his use of technology is based on the text because he perceives ‘a lot of the play is about people spying on each other’ and that cameras watching every move seemed a natural extension of that theme.³¹⁷ This is a key visual point of difference compared to Zeffirelli’s film, which as noted in the previous chapter, places less stress on watching and more on hearing.

The oppressive, fractured sense of reality is mirrored by Almeryda’s ‘ragged, jagged, inventive’ style of filming, influenced by Orson Welles’ *Macbeth* (1948). The latter describes his own film as a ‘rough, charcoal sketch’,³¹⁸ prompting Almeryda to think that ‘you don’t need lavish production values to make a Shakespeare movie that’s accessible and alive’.³¹⁹ As a result, Almeryda describes his film ‘an attempt at *Hamlet*, not so much a sketch but a collage’, a visual analogue of Olivier’s more literary ‘essay in Hamlet’ made in 1948.³²⁰ As noted earlier, Almeryda shot the film in Manhattan on Super 16mm film – blown up to 35mm when it was released. The purpose of this technical decision was to ‘make everything as urgent and intimate as possible’, with odd camera angles designed to parallel the ‘surprise twists and turns of Shakespeare’s verse’,³²¹ an echo of Cartmell’s description of Zeffirelli seeking to find ‘visual correlatives to the words’.³²² In Almeryda’s version, however, this search for

³¹⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20000512friday.html accessed 1 June 2015.

³¹⁷ Harry Keyishian ‘Shakespeare and genre’ in Jackson, pp. 82-3.

³¹⁸ Crowl, p. 188.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ William Shakespeare and Alan Holmes Dent, *Hamlet. The Film and the Play. Edited by Alan Dent. Designs by Roger Furse. [With photographic reproductions of scenes from the film.]*, (London: World Film Publications, 1948).

³²¹ Crowl, p. 188.

³²² Cartmell in Jackson, p. 224.

correlatives leads him to create a ‘movie about urban isolation and the damage it causes, using corrupting wealth as a surrogate for stained royalty’.³²³ In the film America’s corporate leaders are far from the moral, altruistic beings their corporate PR might want to suggest; here they are portrayed as corrupt, venal and self-centred.

The city landscape perfectly mirrors this theme with New York becoming, in Crowl’s words, ‘one huge, glittering mirror, refracting light and reflecting images’. Almereyda uses these surfaces to show Hamlet reflected in the window of the limousine; to show mirror-images of life on the glass walls of apartment and office blocks; there are mirrored doors in his mother’s bedroom; Hamlet’s image is distorted in the Laundromat washer; Ophelia is reflected in the ripples of the pool and swimming pool. In *Hamlet* (2000), the Manhattan skyline is a ‘sterile promontory’ rather than a place of excitement; threatening and sinister rather than welcoming. Where the play’s Hamlet looks up to see a sky ‘fretted with fire’, Almereyda’s Hamlet sees the lights of commercial outlets and the stock exchange figures racing across the tops of the buildings.³²⁴ The only time the story leaves the harsh, glaring cityscape is when Hamlet rides on the back of Horatio’s motorbike to the funeral. Almereyda intended this to be ‘a return to a more natural, honest landscape – earth and death – presided over by the wit and wisdom of the gravedigger’. Unfortunately, Almereyda – by his own admission – made a mess of this scene. The ‘tone and the timing were off, and the whole episode seemed to side-track Hamlet’s response to Ophelia’s death’ he wrote.³²⁵ As a result, the scene at the grave seemed stilted – as does the final scene on the

³²³ Crowl, pp. 188-9.

³²⁴ Ibid. p. 190.

³²⁵ Ibid. pp. 190-1.

rooftop – and the film comes to a rapid conclusion. This issue, where stylistic choices have structural consequences, will be explored at greater length later in this chapter.

Almereyda's *Hamlet*, played by Ethan Hawke, is an introverted experimental filmmaker. Elvis Mitchell, in the *New York Times*, describes him as 'wearing knit caps that make him look like a lost member of the Spin Doctors, [...] mired in an arrested adolescence that infantilizes him'.³²⁶ This *Hamlet* collects and stores memories in his modern commonplace book – the video camera – subsequently recombining them into something new in his home edit suite. Julia Stiles' Ophelia brings with her the transtextual independence she personified in Gil Junger's *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999) – a modernisation of *The Taming of The Shrew*. In keeping with the corporate theme, Kyle MacLachlan plays Claudius as a smooth businessman, whilst Diane Venora plays Gertrude as bright, alert and stylish: although transtextual echoes of her Lady Capulet from Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* bleed through as she descends into being a keen consumer of alcohol as the story develops. Bill Murray plays Polonius with 'a genuine, if misguided and fatal, concern for his children', tucking dollar bills into Laertes's coat and tying Ophelia's shoes,³²⁷ whilst Sam Shepard plays The Ghost with a 'ruined authority' who physically backs Hamlet into corners and is kept in vision much more than he is in the play. There are various portraits of him on walls, video clips from Hamlet's personal collection,

³²⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/12/movies/film-review-a-simpler-melancholy.html>> accessed 1 June 2015.

³²⁷ Crowl, p. 198.

and he returns a third time during the ‘readiness is all’ speech towards the end of the film.³²⁸

Critics also note a variety of changes that Almereyda makes to the structure of the story. Crowl calls it the ‘anti-Branagh Hamlet’ and says that the film involves ‘relentless slashing and repositioning of the text’.³²⁹ He adds that this is a Hamlet without ‘the players, Yorick’s skull, the pictures of the two fathers being compared in the closet scene, and the gravedigger – and it still works’.³³⁰ Crowl does have some reservations: Hamlet’s flight to England is ‘clumsy and ill-conceived’ because the tone is so counter to Hawke’s ‘passive, even pacifist’ Hamlet; the loss of the gravedigger means that the humour is lost ‘along with Hamlet’s acceptance of death as a part of life’; the tussle in the grave is ‘awkwardly blocked and shot’ and the final scene cramped. However, he does think that (along with Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and Julie Taymor’s *Titus* (1999) it is the ‘most radically inventive’ of the adaptations between 1990 and 2000.³³¹

What can be seen in this brief review of the film is that the bulk of the comments concentrate on its visual style. In the rest of this chapter I want to develop a critique of the story structure and to ask, in detail, how the story changes compared to the Shakespearean text.³³²

³²⁸ Ibid. p. 199.

³²⁹ Ibid. p. 189.

³³⁰ Ibid. p. 192.

³³¹ Ibid. pp. 201-2.

³³² Given that there is an account of the structure of Hamlet in the previous chapter, this is not replicated here.

***Hamlet*: The scale of the adaptation challenge**

In comparison to Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) it is clear that Michael Almereyda faced an even more stringent challenge because his film runs at just 112 minutes. Almereyda reduces the 29,747-word text to just 8681 words – a cut of 71%.³³³ Although this is lower than the average for a two-hour film it actually has slightly more words per minute than Zeffirelli's version (77 words per minute compared to Zeffirelli's 76).³³⁴ In other words, the cuts do not (overall) facilitate particularly longer dialogue-free moments than might be present in Zeffirelli's film. As the Table (below) illustrates, Almereyda does not reduce the average length of the speeches by as great a degree as Zeffirelli, although the Player King and Queen are deleted completely.

WORDS PER SPEECH

	Hamlet	Claudius	Polonius	Ghost	Player King	Player Queen
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	30	34	30	48	84	47
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	24	25	36	67	0	0
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	23	17	23	60	22	22

The same basic pattern can also be observed for the less prominent characters (see Table below):

³³³ This figure of 8681 includes 175 words that are gleaned from four non-Shakespearean sources.

³³⁴ To generate the data for comparison between the Norton text and *Hamlet* (2000) the dialogue was transcribed directly from the DVD version of the film into *Final Draft* and cross-checked for comprehension – where necessary – with sub-titles.

WORDS PER SPEECH

	Gertrude	Ophelia	Laertes	Horatio	First Gravedigger	Rosencrantz
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	14	18	21	18	22	15
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	9	17	20	11	23	8
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	13	16	15	12	14	9

The reason for this slightly longer average, as will be explored in the analysis that follows, is that Almereyda simply uses longer unedited sequences of the text in character speeches. This is not absolute throughout the film – in fact as the story progresses the speech lengths actually shorten: nevertheless, as rule-of-thumb this is the main reason for the difference here.

Looking next at the shares of dialogue, what becomes clear is that Almereyda leaves the balance of the main characters fairly stable (compared to the Norton text), with the main loser Horatio (as in Zeffirelli's text). The roles of two female characters are enlarged slightly, but Gertrude's character is not given as prominent a position as Glenn Close attains in *Hamlet* (1990).

PERCENTAGE SHARE OF DIALOGUE

	Hamlet	Claudius	Polonius	Horatio	Gertrude	Ophelia
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	39%	13%	9%	7%	3%	3%
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	41%	14%	10%	3%	4%	5%
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	47%	11%	9%	4%	7%	5%

Against this background the next question is to look at the ways in which the text is cut by Act, particularly in light of Crawl's suggestion that it is subject to 'relentless slashing and repositioning'.³³⁵

HAMLET (2000)

	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3	Act 4	Act 5	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	6618	5646	7008	5073	5402	29,747
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	2699	1116	2102	1551	1038	8681
<i>Percentage cut</i>	60%	80%	70%	70%	81%	71%
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	2671	1592	2846	1351	1393	9853
<i>Percentage cut</i>	60%	72%	60%	73%	74%	67%

What is immediately clear is that although a 4% difference doesn't seem a significant amount (71% versus 67%), this does represent 1172 words of dialogue and Acts 2 and 5 are cut particularly heavily. In Zeffirelli's film the cuts tend to accelerate in the final two acts, and Act 2 is cut – in part – because of the presence of the Players. Looking first at Act 1 (see Table below), Jackson's comment about filmmakers having problems with the beginnings of the plays is again appropriate. Almereyda cuts 96% of the first scene and the dialogue is repositioned elsewhere in the story and used as part of a flashback – in fact, during the Ghost in the Pepsi One machine moment that was noted in the early part of this chapter.

³³⁵ Crawl, p. 189.

HAMLET (2000)

	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	1332	2047	1080	713	1446	6618
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	47	1284	682	105	581	2699
<i>Percentage cut</i>	96%	37%	37%	85%	60%	60%

It is also notable that scenes 1.2 and 1.3 (dealing with the establishment of the royal family, Fortinbras and Polonius's family) are not heavily cut. In contrast, the scenes dealing with the sighting of the Ghost and the revelation of the murder are much more significantly truncated – which may not necessarily have been expected, given the central importance of the Ghost to the story. This gives a clear idea of the general direction to look for changes and their implications.

In addition, there is significant intercutting of scenes, although this looks

Scene Intercutting from the beginning to the Act 1 Turning Point
2.2
1.2
1.1
1.2
1.1
1.2
1.3
1.4
1.5
1.4
1.3

more radical than it perhaps is. As can be seen, the first spoken dialogue – although not the first thing to feature in the film – comes from 2.2, before flashbacks to events in 1.1 are interpolated into 1.2 (where Hamlet meets Horatio). Following this scene 1.3 is split into two sections, one placed in the order of the Shakespearean syuzhet and one placed after the meeting with the Ghost. Thus the First Act Turning Point that was identified in the previous chapter is now followed by a line from 1.4 and a half-scene from 1.3. As will be demonstrated in the detailed analysis, these changes create issues of narrative

coherence. I should make clear here that this in no way makes the case that Almeriyeda necessarily wanted the story to be coherent, merely to begin a

discussion about how variance from the model may create narrative issues that affect comprehension of the fabula.

Looking next at the opening sequence, the first thing to note is the self-conscious narration. Inter-titles contain exposition: the year (New York City, 2000); the key event (The King and C.E.O. of Denmark Corporation is dead); the key event that has flowed out of that (the King's widow has hastily remarried his younger brother); and the reaction of the eponymous hero (The King's son, Hamlet, returns from school, suspecting foul play...). There is then a cut to Hamlet himself and a number of establishing shots of New York at night, a Denmark Corporation advertisement and a shot of the Hotel Elsinore. The narration is not objective here: in framing the remarriage as hasty, albeit only adapting Gertrude's 'o'er hasty marriage' (from 2.2.57) and making Hamlet's suspicions overt, it immediately colours our perceptions. In the light of Bordwell's comments about the primacy effect, I would argue that these few words make it possible that a viewer will judge Gertrude more harshly and Hamlet more sympathetically.

The initial sequence of dialogue, spoken in voice-over by Hamlet, complements a montage of black and white distorted images of himself

Lines retained
2.2 (287-288)
2.2 (293-298)

interspersed with x-rays of a man and an animal, a religious icon, a stealth bomber, a guided missile exploding, a serpent and finally a colour shot of Hamlet revealing that these

images are a home video he is editing. The words themselves are dialogue with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from 2.2 (see inset box, left) that become transformed into a soliloquy on disillusionment with mankind and the destructive power of man's ambition. In terms of schemata, it is not straightforward to

categorise this opening. If prototype schemata are applied there is a sense that Hamlet must be wealthy (as the son and stepson of a hotel chain's CEO), but the glimpses of Hamlet at this point do not seem to fit with this model. In terms of template schemata, the first type to be applied might be a master schema, which as Bordwell points out is 'a framework for understanding, recalling, and summarizing a particular narrative'. In this model the 'perceiver expects each event to be discriminable and to occur in an identifiable locale. The string of events should reveal chronological order and linear causality'.³³⁶ However, it is clear that this sequence does not have a logical cause and effect relationship, which means that a move to procedural schemata (below), might offer insight. These schemata, as noted in Chapter 1, include:

5. *Compositional* motivation: is it relevant to the story?
6. *Realistic* motivation: it is plausible that a character would do this in a real-world situation?
7. *Transtextual* motivation: is this typical of a particular genre?
8. *Artistic* motivation: it is present for its own sake, without explanation – or need for explanation.³³⁷

At this stage it is difficult to tell how relevant these images are to the story; it is impossible to tell if they are realistic, although it does raise a question about why a potentially rich young man would be making amateur video films; the genre is unclear (other than possibly the art-film); therefore, this may just be here for artistic purposes – it is here because it is here.

These distinctions are raised in some detail because, in comparison, the opening scene of *Hamlet* (1990) is much clearer and raises fewer questions. It is

³³⁶ Bordwell, pp. 34-5.

³³⁷ Ibid.

a funeral, there is a dead body, there are mourners and there is a relationship issue that is causing conflict. In contrast, Almereyda's structure poses a number of questions that cannot easily be answered and which do not posit a clear narrative path. This is not to say that Zeffirelli's film is superior to Almereyda's or vice-versa: merely to note that this film poses more open questions.

What is then immediately apparent is that Almereyda, like Zeffirelli, moves straight to scene 1.2, not 1.1 (albeit a few lines from 1.1 are used later in flashback), seeming to regard 1.1 as a satellite rather than a kernel. This again highlights Jackson's observation that film-makers tend to have a problem with the openings and endings of these plays. However, it is true to say that the opening scene is not such a problem in the case of *Romeo+Juliet* (1996), which begins with extracts from the fight scene – or indeed *Tempest* (2010), which begins with a storm. What this suggests is that Shakespeare plays that open with action-oriented events might need to be less heavily edited than those, like *Hamlet*, that open with extensive, preliminary and concentrated exposition.

The sequence from 1.2.1-25 (see inset box below) sees Claudius announcing the marriage to Gertrude (as in Zeffirelli) but also deriding the

Lines retained
1.2 (1-25)

planned company takeover by Fortinbras. This is delivered as one long speech (193 words broken by 2 words given to Gertrude – “our thanks”). Whilst this length is not normative

for film dialogue, it is perfectly acceptable when delivered as a public speech. For example, it would not be unusual in a mainstream film to see a judge, a politician or another public figure deliver a speech longer than normal – the norm being 12-15 words. However, in keeping with the way lengthy speeches are normally filmed in the cinema, the camera spends very little time on Claudius,

minimising the impact and content of his speech. The narration is focused on the particular shots that are chosen and their ordering. This shows Hamlet the filmmaker (although it does not explain why he is filming). It then articulates a close relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, and inserts a proposed deadline for them to meet (3.30pm) accompanied by a picture of the location (a fountain) - the location will become resonant later in the film. The fact that Ophelia is observed trying to pass this message to Hamlet by her father and then stopped from passing it by her brother highlights two themes that are developed in the film: the first is that dialogue is less important than images; the second is the infantilisation of Hamlet and Ophelia by their respective families. In this respect, the narration also takes care to relate Gertrude to Hamlet (through matching close-ups at 00:03:25) and illustrates how her maternal attention is being drawn towards her son even during her new husband's speech. The camera only settles on Claudius for a lengthier period when it is necessary to identify Fortinbras from the front of the newspaper and to allow him to theatrically dismiss the challenge.

As Sarah Hatchuel has points out, 'as opposed to the theatre, in which the stage is wholly perceived at every moment, cinema can disclose elements little by little to compose the action'.³³⁸ This scene is a very good example of this in practice. In the theatre eyes tend to be drawn to Claudius; in the film our attention is deliberately moved towards the other characters. The effect here is twofold. As Hatchuel also points out, the dynamic of action/reaction in the cinema – facilitated by editing – 'creates a space that is unknown in the theatre: the spectator has the opportunity [...] to look through the eyes of the

³³⁸ Hatchuel, p. 61.

characters’.³³⁹ This process creates a sense of identification with the characters that are doing the looking. In this case it is Hamlet, Ophelia and Gertrude; it is not Claudius.

This also means that the business meeting becomes secondary to the proposed meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet; and whilst it is true that there is a picture of Old Hamlet on the wall, there is no way of knowing (at this stage) who he is. In addition, whilst the words ‘Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother’s death / The memory be green’ are spoken, the camera does not reveal the speaker, making it difficult to identify the source of the voice, or whether it is important to pay attention to what is being said. In other words, the narration is deliberately establishing (via the primacy effect again) the relative importance of four relationships: Hamlet and Ophelia; Ophelia with her brother and father; Hamlet and his mother; and lastly (but to a lesser degree) Gertrude and Claudius. It is reasonable to speculate that the types of hypothesis the viewer will be creating at this point (whether they are a Shakespeare expert or neophyte) are more likely to concern how these relationships might evolve than anything to do with the death of Old Hamlet or the fate of the company.

The next sequence (1.2.42-63) reinforces this relationship-orientation

Lines retained
1.2 (42)
1.2 (47-55)
1.2 (57-63)

when, like Zeffirelli, Almereyda moves the action into a private sphere rather than the public forum. The textual function (in Shakespeare) involves Claudius granting Laertes permission to return to France. In the film narration

Polonius and Laertes act like the parents of toddlers, having to round-up Hamlet and Ophelia who, unless monitored constantly, walk away and talk privately. In

³³⁹ Ibid. p. 52.

addition, Gertrude and Claudius dance and she hangs off him in a very singular fashion: a style that will be picked up later by Hamlet when he compares how she acted with his father. This brief scene again minimises the importance of language by making the subtext the focus rather than the text. As Hatchuel points out (quoting Stanislavski), subtext ‘is the manifest, the inwardly felt expression of a human being in a part, which flows uninterruptedly beneath the words of the text, giving them life and a basis for existing’.³⁴⁰ Cowl goes further, suggesting that ‘the success of the images drives Shakespeare’s language into becoming the film’s subtext rather than its text’.³⁴¹ Here the scene communicates a struggle for control over Hamlet and Ophelia that is unrelated to the textual surface: a struggle that is punctuated at the end of the scene by Claudius having to drag Hamlet by the collar to stop him walking away again – thus infantilising him.

The next scene (1.2.64-120, see inset box below) again, like Zeffirelli, places the action in a personalised setting, albeit in the street. The essence of the

Lines retained
1.2 (64)
1.2 (66)
1.2 (68-80)
1.2 (83-88)
1.2 (90-96)
1.2 (112-116)
1.2 (118-120)

text is that Hamlet is told that he cannot return to Wittenberg. What is notable however, is the way the stylistic choices place the emphasis on Hamlet and his mother, rather than on conflict with Claudius. Hamlet’s caustic retort ‘A little more than kin and less than kind’ is deleted and the narration (via a two-shot) follows

Gertrude’s attempts to coax her son from his melancholy – the bond further reinforced visually by the fact that they both wear sunglasses. The final result, after a brief intervention by Claudius is that Hamlet decides to stay, but what is absent in this scene is a sense of motivation: why do they want him to stay? In

³⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 133.

³⁴¹ Cowl, p. 128.

Shakespeare's syuzhet it is made clear that Hamlet should think of Claudius as 'of a father' and that he is the 'the most immediate to my throne' – a fact Zeffirelli communicates at the outset of his film. Here the narration fails to articulate a clear reason (and the only mention of the word 'son' is spoken when Claudius is out of shot). This leaves the viewer to conclude that the reason he must stay is because of his mother's wishes – again to some degree infantilising him (a factor reinforced by the child-like head gear). From a textual perspective, Almeryeda uses the same technique of inter-speech cutting adopted by Zeffirelli, but combined, in places, with far longer shot-lengths. For example, the camera lingers in a low angle two-shot on Hamlet and Gertrude for 22 seconds (00:06:04 – 00:06:26). The interpretational consequences are that the eye is drawn away to other parts of the shot, searching for movement and action; but there is no movement, just the blank walls of the skyscrapers, communicating alienation and coldness.

The next sequence – intercut with Ophelia waiting to meet Hamlet for their 3.30 liaison – is Hamlet's 'O that this too, too, sullied flesh' soliloquy,

Lines retained	delivered in voice-over whilst he sits in his room spooling
1.2 (129-133)	through footage of his mother and father. Almeryeda retains
1.2 (134-142)	relatively long sections of the text (see inset box) with the
1.2 (143-159)	narrative being modulated by the accompanying visuals. His father's Hyperion-
	like qualities are spoken of as Old Hamlet covers the lens when Hamlet films
	him, suggesting modesty; his mother's fickleness is communicated by footage of
	her hanging off Old Hamlet in a similar fashion to the way she hung off Claudius
	in the earlier scene. Meanwhile, Ophelia waits by the fountain: a meeting that
	Hamlet never makes. Does Hamlet equate Ophelia with the 'frailty' he associates

with women in general (1.2.146)? Or does his obsession with his mother's 'frailty' make him forget? These questions (amongst others) are raised as a result of the narration but they are never answered.

The narration has largely followed the chronological order of the play until this point (with the exception of the opening words from 2.2) and uses fairly

Lines retained
1.2 (164-168)
1.2 (173)
1.2 (175-195)
1.2 (198)
1.2 (211)
1.2 (212-213)
1.1 (122)
1.2 (214-217)
1.1 (108-110)
1.1 (48)
1.1 (111-113)
1.1 (116)
1.1 (47)
1.2 (220-225)
1.2 (229-230)
1.2 (231-234)
1.2 (241)
1.2 (244-253)
1.2 (255-257)

long sections of text (in comparison with Zeffirelli's tendency to use shorter extracts). In this sequence, although material is intercut out of chronological order (and in flashback), the key message is communicated: the Ghost of Old Hamlet has been seen. Yet, there is an undoubted sense that the narrative is somewhat incoherent. This is partly a stylistic issue: the acting performances are uniformly flat, dour and emotionless – a feature Lawrence Guntner notes, when he writes that the actors 'recite Shakespeare's blank verse as flatly and unpretentiously as if Hamlet were a television sitcom or *Saturday Night Live*'.³⁴² However, the narrative incoherence is also the

result of another factor, referenced in Chapter One, that will manifest itself to a greater degree as the film progresses: that is a lack of spatial orientation. Roger Furse notes the importance of this factor in comprehending a film narrative when discussing Olivier's film of *Hamlet* (1948). He notes that 'the essence of the film is that it is *not* still. It is in motion, and ... the designer's business is to do everything he can to assist the mobility and flow'.³⁴³ This comment makes clear the importance of the way the characters move through space – are they

³⁴² Guntner in Jackson, p. 126.

³⁴³ Davies in Davies and Wells, p. 3.

constricted or liberated, do they range across open country or within the limits of a city, do they operate within a setting that is realistic or overtly artificial? Davies points out that the influence of a particular space and the way it is used ‘point to spatial strategy as being more important than authenticity of location, and cinematically more crucial than the actor’s performance’.³⁴⁴ In other words, the opposite of what one might value in the theatre, where the actor’s performance plays a far more prominent role in critical analysis.

The way space is established in the film is by an emphasis is on the city per se, rather than a specific part. Hamlet’s apartment is probably part of the Hotel Elsinore but this is not fully articulated. Claudius’s speech was given in what is presumably a conference room in the same hotel. They walk down a street and stop at 48th and Park, which is the most clearly specified place in the film (although people familiar with the city would, no doubt, be able to pinpoint locations more accurately). Ophelia stands next to a fountain in an undisclosed location. And in this scene, although a doorbell is heard, Horatio, Marcella (a feminised Marcellus) and Barnardo simply seem to appear in Hamlet’s apartment without being admitted. The ghost is sighted in what appears to be a hotel basement corridor and disappears into a Pepsi One vending machine. This withholding of spatial information means that a viewer will try to fill in these spatial gaps in the storyworld whilst simultaneously trying to fill in other narrative gaps. For example, there is also a lack of information about the characters of Horatio, Marcella and Barnardo. This is where the setting of the story in New York causes narrative gaps to open up that do not occur in Zeffirelli’s version. It is clear why a night-watchman might be on duty – but who

³⁴⁴ Davies in *ibid.* p. 4.

is Horatio specifically, and who is the girl with him? What do they do? Do they have a job? Are they students? If so, why are they on duty with the night-watchman? The lack of spatial and prototype information here causes a greater and greater number of narrative gaps to open up across different semantic fields – something that will proliferate during the film.

Comparing this to Zeffirelli's storyworld, there is a sense that action happens there within a relatively well-defined area – for example, by the time Hamlet confronts Ophelia sewing, she has been seen in that room before as part of a group of women sewing, and so the viewer can concentrate on what is happening not where it is happening. The consequence of this lack of spatial and prototype specificity, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is a sense of alienation, fractured experience and disorientation. My commentary here is not decrying this, but noting the structural mechanism by which it is achieved. In terms of deadlines, the final action projects the narrative forward, insofar as Hamlet clearly sets up the idea of meeting the guard between 1pm and midnight – although this is another meeting that fails to materialise.

Having made Ophelia highly visible but mute in the opening 14 minutes of the film, the narration now shows her holding a photograph of a youthful

Lines retained	Hamlet: intimating a relationship that has been in existence for some time but also connecting them back to the idea of childhood. The focus of this scene featuring Ophelia and Laertes, (see inset box, 1.3.14-84), is not so much on what is said but how it is said and on Ophelia's physical response.
1.3 (14-35)	
1.3 (43-72)	
1.3 (75-76)	
1.3 (78-80)	
1.3 (82-84)	

As in the earlier scene in the hotel she seems subject to invisible forces that push her away from Laertes towards a wall and then back towards him. Where

Zeffirelli suggests an incestuous attraction between Gertrude and Hamlet, here Liev Schreiber's Laertes projects an overly protective brotherly interest in his sister – aided perhaps by the 14-year age gap between the actors in real life (he was 33 and she was just 19). The room becomes less a place of family love than a cage, which she paces but cannot escape. Her few words (1.3.45-51) are delivered without emotion, hope or humour.

On the arrival of Polonius the location shifts to a lower level of the apartment, and here the spatial arrangement is unusually clear. The text (Polonius's advice) is delivered in long, unedited sections – in contrast to Zeffirelli's strategy – but the most notable factors are, again, the behaviours. Ophelia mirrors Hamlet's behaviour and records life – this time in her preferred medium, photography. Meanwhile, Laertes and Polonius are uneasy in each other's presence – as Polonius approaches Laertes turns his back or moves to the other side of the room – mirroring Ophelia's behaviour earlier; the image of an emotionally dysfunctional family. Polonius's emotional attachment is demonstrated in commercial terms by the covert stuffing of dollar bills into his son's coat, rather than in physical closeness. The scene then closes with a reminder of Laertes' concern for his sister, as he covertly removes her hairgrip to take with him (this is again a material object but also shaped like butterfly, perhaps indicative of fragile beauty and a short life). This is a particularly good example of something that occurs regularly in this film: the use of subtext. These actors are not simply playing what is said; they are inviting the audience to hypothesise about the characters' true feelings and to speculate about what this means.

Having noted that the *syuzhet* has, largely, been presented in chronological order until this point, Almeryeda then makes changes that have implications for the overall structure of the story. The first observation is that the narration leaps forward to an invented scene in a limousine with Gertrude, Claudius and Hamlet. From a narrative comprehension perspective the viewer is not primed to understand why they are there, but a newspaper headline makes it clear that Fortinbras's takeover has been thwarted; on their arrival at an event (not specified or located spatially), Hamlet leaves them without notice - again, further building the sense of alienation, dislocation and dysfunction.

Hamlet is next seen back in his apartment being woken by a phone call from Barnardo, Horatio and Marcella, which he does not answer because the

Lines retained
1.4 (20-25)
1.5 (2-6)
1.5 (9-28)
1.5 (34-52)
1.5 (58-70)
1.5 (74)
1.5 (77-88)
1.5 (91)
1.5 (189-190)

Ghost is present. This section replicates Almeryeda's now familiar strategy of using long unedited sequences of text (see inset box, left) but is most notable for the physical closeness of Hamlet and his father compared to either Polonius's family or, indeed the relationship between father and son in Zeffirelli's film. Here Hamlet is backed into a corner, held, touched, manhandled and embraced strongly.

There is a sense of close emotional connection between Hamlet and his father.

It is therefore the more surprising that at this pivotal moment (the First

Lines retained
1.5 (114)
1.5 (121)
1.5 (166-169)
1.4 (58)

Act Turning Point that has been pulled forward) the experience fails to motivate an emotional change in Hamlet. There is no 'remember thee?' from Ethan Hawke's Hamlet (see inset box, left); merely a rueful

glance at the Ghost along with Horatio and Marcella who, again, just appear in

his apartment. More significantly the entire ‘swearing’ section (1.5.146-182) has been deleted, along with Hamlet’s commitment to put ‘an antic disposition on’ (1.5.173) and the action finishes with a line culled from the previous scene (‘My fate cries out’ – 1.4.58). The implications of these changes will be profound for the narrative coherence of the story, as will be discussed later.

Suffice it to say that there is no clearly indicated forward momentum in Almereyda’s story because there is no commitment to revenge and no plan to feign madness. Almereyda clearly regards these two elements (seen as kernels by Shakespeare and Zeffirelli) as satellites that can be ignored. The cut means that there is no reason for the audience to hypothesize about what Hamlet’s madness might engender or for any other character to describe him as mad. This might be assuaged by Ethan Hawke’s characterisation suggesting madness – after all the narrative doesn’t demand that Hamlet *tell* the audience of his intentions – but his characterisation remains uniformly flat. This situation raises interpretational questions. It might mean that the audience needs to suppose that the other characters think Hamlet is mad – which presumes foreknowledge of the story. Alternatively, the audience might be meant to assume that this is a storyworld where Hamlet can be categorised as mad without appearing to be so – a topsy-turvy reality. I would argue that the first of these cannot be taken for granted and it is my opinion that the second option is not clearly pursued or articulated in the film. The upshot is that a comprehensibility problem is created here.

A further narrative issue arises as a result of Almereyda’s next choice: repositioning the second sequence of 1.3 (lines 88-126) after scene 1.5 (see inset box on the following page). In terms of Bordwell’s observations about the importance of cause and effect relationships, there is a disjunction here. A certain

amount of screen time has elapsed since Polonius heard Laertes tell Ophelia to ‘remember well what I have said to you’ (1.3.84-85). However, it is not clear

Lines retained
NON-SHAKESPEAREAN DIALOGUE: (MR MOVIEFONE)
1.3 (88-90)
1.3 (98-101)
1.3 (105-107)
1.3 (110-111)
1.3 (116-120)
1.3 (104)
1.3 (120-126)

whether any time has elapsed in the storyworld or if this is a time jump back to the previous day. Whatever the situation, there is not a tight temporal connection between Polonius overhearing the words and reacting – although there is spatial consistency because the action takes place in the same apartment. In terms of textual editing this section is different to the

pattern established this far and is much more in the mould of Zeffirelli – with inter-speech cuts as opposed to longer unbroken sections of text. Nevertheless, the character behaviours are consistent. Polonius moves towards her and Ophelia moves away. Instead of defending herself in the spirit of the aggressive transtextual Julia Stiles, her response is repressed; she gazes at a wood carving illustrating a path into a dark wood. Does she want to escape or is she being driven into a dark place? Polonius commands her to stay away from Hamlet because he knows that ‘when the blood burns’ in young men like the prince (1.3.116) they tell lies. The essential problem is a young man’s predilection to lust that is exacerbated by the difference in social status between Hamlet and Ophelia. To cap the scene she has her laces tied up by her father, continuing her infantilisation. What is more significant is that this event – rather than the sighting of the Ghost – now effectively becomes the First Act Turning Point that helps to propel the action of the next Act in the absence of Hamlet’s ‘madness’. This is already evidence that Almereyda is employing a significantly different

strategy towards textual editing, syuzhet re-ordering and stylistic choices compared to either Shakespeare or Zeffirelli. These choices are beginning to have a profound effect on narrative comprehension and the overall meaning of the story, with an enhanced focus being placed upon the story of Ophelia and Hamlet.

First Act Turning Point to the Midpoint

The next main section of Shakespeare's syuzhet now runs from here to a Midpoint at the end of 3.2 – the moment where Hamlet knows his uncle is guilty and decides to take action ('Now could I drink hot blood' – 3.2.360). Almereyda cuts the text in this section by 77% – a much greater proportion than the 60% he deleted from Act 1 (see Table below).

HAMLET (2000)

	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	956	4690	1506	2941	10093
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	0	1116	756	480	2352
<i>Percentage cut</i>	100%	76%	50%	84%	77%
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	0	1592	777	880	3249
<i>Percentage cut</i>	100%	66%	48%	70%	68%

Scene 2.1 (Reynaldo being briefed to spy on Laertes and Ophelia's report of Hamlet's 'madness') is regarded as a satellite and deleted. In addition, 76% of scene 2.2 is cut (almost 8 words from every 10), along with an even more significant 84% of scene 3.2 (due to the play-within-the-play scene being replaced by a film-within-the-film). Only scene 3.1 (the 'remembrances' scene with Ophelia) remains relatively unscathed. As seen in the Table (above), these

cuts (with the exception of 3.1) are significantly deeper than the ones made by Zeffirelli. Having analysed the level of narrative disjunction already introduced into the first part of the story (where the cuts were less severe), how do these changes affect narrative coherence?

Looking also at the way the syuzhet is reordered (in terms of scene

Scene Intercutting from the First Act Turning Point to the Midpoint.
2.2
3.1
1.4
2.2
3.1
2.2
3.1
2.2
3.1
3.2

elements) it is a fairly simple arrangement (see inset left), with regular intercuts between 2.2 and 3.1 (the exception being one interpolated element from 1.4). By way of comparison, Zeffirelli's approach to intercutting introduced scene 3.2 (the play-within-the-play scene) much earlier. However, a significant proportion of the text in scene 3.2 is unnecessary for Almercyda (in terms of the agency that delivers the message) because he creates an

innovatory vehicle for the transmission of this story kernel – the film-within-the-film.

Returning to the narrative in detail and applying a traditional mainstream schema, the expectation would be for the narrative to pick up on the previous event; either a reaction to Hamlet's behaviour or the proof of Claudius's apparent guilt (which happens in the play where Claudius decides to send Hamlet to England). Here a connection is made, but much more obliquely; in fact I would argue that the narrative is so oblique that it can only really be reassembled in retrospect. One danger of this is it erodes a neophyte audience's capacity to make links – or even the desire to make links – because it is only possible to hold a few options open at the same time. This difficulty in reconstructing the fabula may not, of course, be relevant to an audience familiar with Shakespeare; here the

film may be seen as a postmodern commentary on both *Hamlet* and the fin-de-siècle New York/slacker/US culture.³⁴⁵ However, the intention here is to look at the elements in some detail from a neophyte's perspective and to try and establish a link between them.

This section of the film, instead of following a direct cause and effect narrative relationship, moves to video footage of a Buddhist monk (Thich Nhat

Lines retained
<p>NON-SHAKESPEAREAN DIALOGUE: THICH NHAT HANH</p> <p>2.2 (110-111) 2.2 (116-119)</p>

Hanh) talking about the concept of 'inter-being'. After listening, Hamlet spools to footage of Ophelia, prompting the hypothesis that he wishes to 'inter-be' with her – although this is discordant with the fact that he failed to meet her at the fountain earlier, without

explanation. Putting that objection to one side, this suggestion of inter-being appears to prompt Hamlet to begin attempting to write a love poem to Ophelia (verbalising 2.2.110-11 and 2.2.116-19 in voice-over) – with the time-lapse expressed via jump cuts. As Sarah Hatchuel points out, these cuts have the additional effect of making this 'interpolated scene [...] episodic' and creates not only a sense of time passing but of an 'amateur, clumsy poet' at work.³⁴⁶

The final words of this excerpt ('never doubt I love' – 2.2.119) motivate a wordless visit to Ophelia: he stands outside her apartment, framed against the window posters of a brashly commercial, price-oriented supermarket outlet: another image of how everything in this world has a transactional value. The contrast, with Ophelia's apartment is stark: a hand-drawn sign on the doorbell

³⁴⁵ I am indebted to Professor Diana Henderson for pointing out (in private correspondence) the important qualification that a New York audience would have little difficulty in identifying either the various locales or the zeitgeist implied in the film.

³⁴⁶ Hatchuel, p. 46.

and a door-less apartment suggesting a place of innocence, openness and freedom where they embrace warmly – something that, as pointed out earlier, has only been seen between Hamlet and his father in this film to-date. However, this word-less freedom is short-lived when, after presenting the poem, they are surprised by Polonius bearing birthday balloons (yet again infantilising his daughter). As Hamlet hurries out and Polonius discovers the poem (providing a narrative link to a future scene), the balloons are released and it is noticeable that one of them bears the image of George Washington – a founding father of America. Here his concepts of freedom and respect for the rights of the individual have been harnessed and cheapened by their metamorphosis into the ephemera of commercial production.

This scene provokes another flight from the commercialised world into a moment of isolation, as Hamlet watches a black and white video of himself on a portable video player pointing a gun at himself and contemplating suicide, repeating the opening line of ‘to be or not to be’ several times (3.1.58 – see inset

Lines retained
3.1 (58) 1.4 (18.7-18.20)

box, left). This cuts, again without motivation but linked via the carrying of the video player, to an office block where Hamlet contemplates the ‘one defect’ of a man that leads to ‘corruption’ (1.4.18.7ff). One

hypothesis that this suggests is that here is a character who needs a recorded version of himself to motivate himself – an example of the recorded world interacting with the ‘real’ world.

At this point, Polonius surprises Hamlet and, after being referred to as a ‘fishmonger’ (2.2.175) concludes, with a glance to CCTV cameras, that the prince is ‘mad’ (2.2.189-190). Again the viewer must guess why Polonius arrives

at that moment – presumably he was alarmed by Hamlet’s presence at Ophelia’s apartment, but that doesn’t easily explain the temporal delay. In the play Shakespeare has overtly motivated this meeting by placing it after the ‘your noble son is mad’ scene (beginning at 2.2 87-109). The issue here is that where Shakespeare and Zeffirelli go to some pains to establish why a relationship with

Lines retained
2.2 (172-181)
2.2 (183-187)
2.2 (189-190)
2.2 (204-205)
2.2 (210-213)

Hamlet is dangerous, here it is not effected with any degree of coherence and is difficult to process using any reasonable set of schemata except the artistic – it is like this just because it is like this. The viewer must also guess why Polonius speaks direct to the CCTV cameras

– who is listening and will this be picked up later? In addition, it is unclear why Polonius would conclude that Hamlet is mad: he looks and behaves no differently to the way he has throughout the story to-date. When Polonius then asks to ‘take [his] leave’ he is rebuffed by Hamlet with the line ‘You cannot [...] take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal, except my life’ (2.2.210-213). Hamlet then cocks a gun and runs through the office with it, before bursting into Claudius’s office only to find him not there. It must be assumed, at this point, that Hawke’s Hamlet has already decided that he can follow the Ghost’s instruction and kill Claudius without further proof (unlike Zeffirelli’s version and most stage versions). It is also not easy to follow how or why he comes to this conclusion and the action also flies in the face of his ‘slacker’ characterisation.

The sense of realism is also tested when Polonius fails to hear the gun being cocked, and the secretary fails to take any notice of Hamlet brandishing the weapon in his stepfather’s office. This is not to say that everything that happens

in a film must be realistic and there is certainly a distinction between realism and verisimilitude. As Hatchuel points out, ‘in opposition to what is considered ‘realistic’, verisimilitude covers the range of viewers’ expectations about what is believable and acceptable for representation’. As a result, ‘verisimilitude can involve totally unrealistic (but acceptable) acts such as characters bursting into song during a film musical’.³⁴⁷ However, whilst the events in this film could, in some circumstances, be dismissed as occurring in a world where such things fail to register, this has not been set up in prior scenes as normative for the storyworld. This is one of the downsides of a modern setting that will resurface later: if this is New York in 2000, it is reasonable to assume (again applying procedural schemata) that someone would react to man brandishing a gun in an office – even if he is the CEO’s stepson.

Having said all of that, when it is looked at in isolation (and in retrospect) this montage of scenes does bring together the two plot lines (the revenge plot and the love plot). However, the looseness of the connections makes it difficult for the viewer to span the narrative gaps in real time. What it does communicate, however, is a sense of a fractured reality, where causes do not lead to effects in what might be regarded as a normal fashion.

In summary this is a sequence that places relatively lengthy textual excerpts from two different scenes (1.4 and 2.2) in juxtaposition. This, to some degree, illustrates why Bordwell argues that syuzhet innovations tend to be rare in mainstream narratives; the sequence certainly conveys a sense of discontinuity, disorder and randomness, but it also impedes easy comprehension. This is not to

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 125.

argue that the only consideration is comprehensibility – just to point out that unexplained narrative gaps strain the ability to process information in real time.

The scene that now follows in the film is based upon lines that are placed earlier in the Shakespearean syuzhet (see inset box below – 2.2.87-159). Almereyda returns to his previous strategy of using relatively long extracts from

Lines retained
2.2 (87-109)
2.2 (114)
2.2 (120-135)
2.2 (136)
2.2 (138-142)
2.2 (145-153)
2.2 (157-159)

the text unedited – an approach that necessitates, as before, frequent cutaways and a shift of focus onto Ophelia. Essentially Polonius shows Claudius and Gertrude the poem that Hamlet gave to Ophelia and argues that being deprived of Ophelia's love has made Hamlet mad. The major problem with this arrangement, as mentioned above,

is that Hamlet has never overtly mentioned the intention of appearing mad (1.5.173) and does not appear to be mad. In addition, the encounter when Ophelia reveals Hamlet's madness to her father is cut, (2.1.75-101) along with Polonius's plan to tell Claudius and Gertrude (2.1.102-120).

Polonius is once more seen infantilising Ophelia (leading her by the hand) and her inner state of desperation is revealed as she (yet again) moves away from her father and plunges into the swimming pool (only, as it turns out, in her imagination). This is an association between her and water that Almereyda develops throughout the film and which foreshadows her death in the fountain – a place also associated with her love of Hamlet. One notable aspect of this scene is the fact that, because Shakespeare did not include her at this point, she has no lines. This dumb Ophelia therefore remains enigmatic and the audience's interest is more focused on what she might do than rather than speculating about whether Claudius and Gertrude might believe Polonius's theory about the source of

Hamlet's madness – in fact Hamlet's mother and stepfather appear monumentally disinterested in Polonius's idea. From a narrative cohesion perspective, this scene not only contains Polonius's reaction to something that hasn't happened (there is no madness), but also implies no specific action – Polonius suggests that he will find out the truth, but not how, where or when.

As a result, the following scene (the 'to be or not to be' soliloquy in Blockbuster Video – 3.1.58-90) does not appear to have any overt motivation (see inset box). The long segments of unedited text (excepting Hawke's faulty

Lines retained
3.1 (58-66)
3.1 (67-90)

memorising of the soliloquy) combines with long takes to juxtapose the words with an arresting mise-en-scene. The eye wanders looking for narratively relevant information

and discovers Hamlet the inactive revenger wandering through the action department. The ghostly figure emerging through flames on an overhead TV is Brandon Lee in *The Crow* (1994): the choice of this clip has multiple ironic levels because *The Crow* not only tells the story of a man who comes back from the dead to seek revenge for a murder, but is also notable for the fact that Brandon Lee was accidentally killed on set and scenes had to be reconstructed via digital effects and rewrites. The re-editing of life experiences on tape is an activity that Hamlet the filmmaker is also involved in during Almereyda's film. Lastly, because this scene is taken away from the contextualising material present in the play – e.g. the 'nunnery' meeting with Ophelia (3.1.91-149), which has been delayed in the film – Almereyda creates a scene that becomes a standalone meditation on the desire to die.

The next section – where 2.2.220-264, 3.1.1-14 and 2.2.31-34 are yoked together out of order (see inset box below) – is, I would argue, only

comprehensible when the hypothesis building is done in reverse. The audience will only be able to deduce that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been sent by

Lines retained
2.2 (220-226)
2.2 (231-250)
2.2 (262-264)
3.1 (1-14)
2.2 (33-34)
2.2 (31)

Claudius to spy on Hamlet (2.2.220-264) when they hear them report in to Claudius on the telephone (3.1.1-14). The noise in the club also complicates comprehension because the dialogue is less easy to hear. A further issue is that when they deliver the feedback to Claudius over the phone the

viewer does not see their faces – making it difficult to identify voices that have only been heard once before in a noisy nightclub. In addition, as the two spies report in, the eye tends to be drawn to the action on the screen, which features Claudius and Gertrude lying on a bed, apparently preparing for sex. This increases the sense of discordance because they do not appear particularly interested in the news – therefore Hamlet is, presumably, no real threat to Claudius.

In what is now developing into a montage of scenes with little overt narrative connection, Hamlet watches video footage of James Dean that he

Lines retained
2.2 (527-531)
2.2 (533-534)
2.2 (537-539)
2.2 (566-571)
2.2 (575-578)
2.2 (580-582)

records for his video memory bank; here Hollywood informs his actions – Dean is the actor who (as the iconic Rebel Without A Cause) motivates Hamlet to think of revenge. This in turn brings him to video footage of Gielgud as Hamlet, promoting the connection that the

‘play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King’. Hamlet is again prompted to action by electronic stimuli. It is a combination of dead screen and stage stars, assembled and reassembled, who are his way of making sense of the

world of New York from which he retreats – and the power of that montage of images he reassembles will be seen in the next few scenes.

At this point there is an unusually clear narrative link to an advert for the film *Hamlet* has made – *The Mousetrap*. In addition, the upshot of Polonius's

Lines retained
3.1 (22-29)
3.1 (40-43)

earlier commitment 'to find out / Where truth is hid'

(2.2.58-9) is that he plans to exploit his semi-mute and

infantilised daughter as a pawn in his plot. She suffers, in

silence, as he puts his hands up the front of her shirt as she is miked-up – further fuelling hypotheses about a dysfunctional and exploitative relationship made more resonant by the transtextual aggressiveness of Stiles' character remaining unexpressed.

Stiles' tears at the end of the previous scene (which Claudius, Gertrude and Polonius completely ignore) are metaphorically mirrored in yet another use

Lines retained
3.1 (93-108)
3.1 (116-118)
3.1 (119-130)
3.1 (132-133)
3.1 (137)
3.1 (135-137)
3.1 (146-148)

of water imagery (a waterfall in an urban garden

embodying an island of naturalness in a world of the

manufactured). This natural imagery was to have been

elaborated in the graveyard scene but, as mentioned

earlier, various artistic concerns torpedoed this plan.

The 'nunnery' scene (3.1.93-148) again tends to work against the text: the words say 'get thee to a nunnery' but it is his desire to touch her body that uncovers the hidden microphone and ends the relationship.

The final sequences of this section of the film are, in some respects, the most narratively coherent. Admittedly, the reasons for Hamlet feeling the need to recognise Horatio's personal qualities (see inset below, 3.2.67-84) remain a mystery, but this does logically follow on to the preparations for a film-within-a-

film, where Hamlet ignores Claudius and his mother, and then mocks Ophelia before a key moment in the film begins. Not only does this deliver the pivotal

Lines retained
3.2 (64-67)
3.2 (68)
3.2 (69-75)
3.2 (77-80)
3.2 (83)
3.2 (98-99)
3.2 (101-110)
3.2 (113-120)
3.2 (84-85)
3.2 (123-125)

structural point – revealing Claudius’s guilt – but it also encapsulates the themes to-date. Where the emphasis in Zeffirelli’s film was to place the audience in the position of Horatio, here the use of the film-within-a-film places the viewer in the same narrative position as Gertrude and Claudius: s/he is seeing this film for the first time, as are they. The juxtaposition of the wordless imagery reinforces the idea, mentioned earlier, that this is a film where the

word is subjugated to the image – where what is seen is privileged over what is heard. The content of the imagery also reinforces another theme seen earlier in the play – the absence of the emotional love and security of the family, illustrated by the archetypal 1950s American family unit and the obvious physical affection shown between father and son. This is destroyed by the imagery of poison and replaced with scenes of not only seduction but also pornographic sex – the debasement of his mother’s love to lust linked by the juxtaposition of shots of the porn actress and his mother (both pale, red-lipped and dark-haired).³⁴⁸ However, it is the denouement of the film-within-the-film, somewhat ironically, that catches the conscience of the commercial king – the image of a crowning. This juxtaposition suggests that it is power that primarily motivates Claudius, not as he claims later, the love of Gertrude.

³⁴⁸ There is also the hint of a metacinematic joke here because the pornographic film clip is said to be from *Deep Throat* – this is, of course, not only the name of a film starring Linda Lovelace but is a reminder of the shadowy character from the Watergate scandal who revealed details of Richard Nixon’s nefarious activities.

As in Zeffirelli's film, Hamlet now believes the Ghost and has a brief moment of triumph (3.2.245-252 –see inset box, below), but this leads to another spatial displacement as a gun-toting Hamlet runs out into the alien world of the street in

Lines retained
3.2 (245)
3.2 (248)
3.2 (244)
3.2 (247)
3.2 (263-267)
3.2 (251-252)
3.2 (272)
NON- SHAKESPEAREAN DIALOGUE
3.2 (272)
3.2 (274-276)
3.2 (282)
3.2 (284-290)
3.2 (292-294)
3.2 (358-362)

pursuit of a Claudius who has effectively disappeared. The spatial displacement continues when, after hailing a cab, he is accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who advise him (and the audience) of Claudius's anger and that they have been sent by his mother – but not what she wants or when she wants to see him (3.2.272-294). What, in the source play, foreshadows a definite meeting is here made, yet again, into a situation where no action is demanded or required. This is followed by Hamlet now pulling up outside the Hotel Elsinore – presumably contemplating revenge as he gets out of

the taxi (which then seems to disappear in keeping with this non-cause and effect world). He then walks through clouds of artistically arranged water vapour and intones part of the 'Tis now the very witching time of night' soliloquy (3.2.358-62). In textual terms the dialogue from scene 3.2 is being used, broadly speaking, in chronological order here. However, sizeable temporal leaps disturb narrative coherence, producing the sense of a world where words are insufficient, thoughts incomplete, and action inconsequential – a feeling that is aided by Eartha Kitt's recorded voice interrupting the Shakespearean dialogue with an instruction to 'buckle up' in the taxi.

From the Midpoint to the Second Act Turning Point

At this point the correlation between the Shakespearean syuzhet and Almereyda's is tenuous. The action, because it is not tightly linked in a cause and effect relationship, now bleeds straight through into the third quarter of the story. What can be clearly seen from the level of cuts to this section of the story (see Table below) is that 68% of the words are cut in the entire section.

HAMLET (2000)

	3.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	788	1773	362	224	530	507	1586	284	1580	7634
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	195	671	0	121	258	199	508	0	465	2417
<i>Percent cut</i>	75%	62%	100%	46%	51%	61%	67%	100%	71%	68%
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	172	1017	74	9	292	0	562	0	414	2540
<i>Percent cut</i>	78%	42%	80%	96%	45%	100%	65%	100%	74%	67%

Overall, the level of cuts is relatively similar to Zeffirelli – in fact Almereyda

Scene Intercutting from the Midpoint to the Second Act Turning Point
3.3
3.4
4.2
4.3
4.4
4.5
4.7

only uses 123 words less. Looking at individual scene differences, Almereyda retains 121 words from scene 4.2 (where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are accused of being sponges) along with 199 words from scene 4.4 (where Fortinbras is shown and Hamlet speaks his 'how all occasions' (4.4.9.23ff) soliloquy from Q2). The former is humorous but not structurally pertinent (it is a

hiatus before the body is found), whereas the latter refers to the Fortinbras plot, which Zeffirelli deletes. What is also very noticeable is that, for a visually and spatially challenging film, this section appears conservative in terms of the

intercutting of scenes. Here (excepting the deletion of 4.1 and 4.6) the scenes are presented in the same order as the play.

Looking at Almereyda's syuzhet in detail, the next section connects to the previous events. Claudius gets into his limousine and immediately, by telephone,

Lines retained
3.3 (1-4)
3.3 (7-10)
3.3 (22-26)
3.3 (36-37)
3.3 (43-46)
3.3 (52-55)
3.3 (64-65)
3.3 (97-98)

briefs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to take Hamlet to England. Again, the remoteness of the relationship and the alienating power of the technology are emphasised by the lack of cutaways that would almost certainly, in a mainstream film narrative, record their reaction and their locations. In the audible presence of Hamlet, Claudius then

admits his guilt in soliloquy – yet Hamlet barely reacts and, although he aims a gun at Claudius, for a reason that is never explained he then gets out of the car and walks away. In contrast, the Shakespearean Hamlet's lack of action at this point is explained by the fact that he does not have access to Claudius's private thoughts. In the film the audience is once again left to hypothesize: what could be the reason for not killing him? One possibility is that the dialogue the viewer hears is privileged – but this is not made obvious. In fact none of these inconsistencies are ever explained, further developing the idea that words lack currency in this storyworld. What can also be observed (see inset box above) are the sizeable cuts to the text, with two or three lines used and then six to ten lines omitted.

What then follows is the longest scene (in terms of lines used) that is set in one location – unsurprisingly, it is scene 3.4 where Hamlet goes to his mother, kills Polonius and then persuades her to reject Claudius. This scene is relatively coherent from a narrative perspective as might be gleaned from the (largely)

sequential use of dialogue (see inset box, below), the restriction of the action to a single location, and the regular use of continuity editing. Running counter to that is the fact that realism (or even verisimilitude) is somewhat stretched by the fact that Polonius becomes one of the few humans still capable of walking after a bullet penetrates his brain..

Lines retained
3.4 (1-4)
3.4 (7)
3.4 (6)
3.4 (4-5)
3.4 (8-12)
3.4 (14-22)
3.4 (24-35)
3.4 (38)
3.4 (66-69)
3.4 (72)
3.4 (81-84)
3.4 (86)
3.4 (93)
3.4 (95)
3.4 (97)
3.4 (96)
3.4 (100-103)
3.4 (105-106)
3.4 (115-116)
3.4 (118)
3.4 (122-123)
3.4 (128)
3.4 (131-133)
3.4 (135)
3.4 (140-143)
3.4 (147-150)
3.4 (156-158)
3.4 (160-161)
3.4 (164-168)
3.4 (170-172)
3.4 (181-185)
3.4 (186-191)

From a setting perspective, there is the sense of dislocation from the world of the family, where ‘home’ is no more than a hotel room and Gertrude’s attempted use of the telephone brings to mind technology’s capacity to insert the outside world into the private space. That said, this is the first time Gertrude is seen without make-up, stripped back to a more unadorned and natural look for this confrontation scene. The main issue here is not so much one of narrative coherence – the events make sense and it is one of the kernels of the story – but one of character coherence. The relative shortness of the scene (the equivalent of 66 lines or 3m 55s without apparent ellipsis) means that Diane Venora’s Gertrude must move relatively quickly from a position where she is angry and preparing to chastise Hamlet – ‘thou hast thy father much offended’ (3.4.9) – to a point where she says ‘O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain’ (3.4.147); in comparison, in Shakespeare’s *syuzhet* Gertrude is given 137 lines to reach this point. One

objection might be that in Zeffirelli’s film the same process also happens in a relatively short time (6m 22s), which is not a significant difference. However, in

Zeffirelli's film the scene is watched against the background of a relationship between Close's Gertrude and Gibson's Hamlet that is more intimate. In other words the emotional distance to be travelled by Glenn Close is not as great as the distance that must be travelled by Diane Venora – this makes the Zeffirelli version of the scene slightly more believable. Again, this is not to argue that Almereyda is trying to make the scene particularly realistic but any character needs to move through a series of logical mental steps to change from one state to another.

The sense of emotional distance that is endemic in this story is also conveyed by Almereyda choosing to show the Ghost from Gertrude's optical point-of-view, whilst making it clear that he remains invisible to her. When she replies that she sees 'Nothing at all' (3.4.123) the Ghost reacts with dismay. Almereyda does bring mother and son slightly closer at the end of this scene by using a cutaway showing Hamlet talking to her on the telephone. This is the first time in the film that the audience has seen the people who are speaking on both ends of a telephone and it reduces, albeit only slightly, the formerly alienating distance of technology. By way of comparison, Hamlet is not seen when he leaves telephone messages for Ophelia; nor are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as they report in by telephone to Claudius. It is a small, but significant, gesture. Lastly, Almereyda does make use of redundancy – a technique he has largely eschewed for much of the film – when Hamlet confirms he must go 'to England'.

With an ironic twist on the idea of not washing one's dirty linen in public, the following two scenes (4.2/4.3) are combined, with one part located in a Laundromat and another outside an airport. With the rotating driers mirroring Hamlet's whirling mind, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to persuade him to

tell them where the body is (4.2.4-28 – see inset box, below). This ‘sponges’ scene is regarded as a satellite by Zeffirelli and indeed it contributes very little from a plot perspective: however, it does set up the antipathy that will send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths. In addition, the seamless link to the following scene (as Claudius enters – 4.3.11ff) demonstrates the truth of Hatchuel’s assertion that, like Elizabethan theatre, a film scene can ‘move on

Lines retained
4.2 (4-11)
4.2 (13-15)
4.2 (23-28)
4.3 (11-13)
4.3 (17-21)
4.3 (22-25)
4.3 (32-49)
4.3 (51-54)
4.3 (57-58)
4.3 (66-68)

with great rapidity and fluidity’ and can ‘go quickly from a battle scene to a discussion behind closed doors inside a palace’.³⁴⁹ From a narrative perspective, having had Rosencrantz and Guildenstern established as spies, the narrative gap explaining why they are in the Laundromat is now easily filled. The function of the scene – to discover the location of the body – is made more menacing both by the presence of bodyguards. Claudius’s use of violence to obtain

the location of Polonius’s corpse is first overt sign of ruthlessness and is followed by Hamlet being despatched to England via aeroplane. The sequence finishes with Gertrude now transformed to a tottering drunk – presumably her emotional response to the killing and Hamlet leaving. The final words, spoken in voice-over by Claudius, advise of the ‘present death of Hamlet’ but the acting subtext between him and Gertrude actually conveys a developing unease as she embraces Hamlet but recoils from Claudius’s touch.

Almeryda then chooses to include a sizeable percentage of scene 4.4 to remind the audience of Fortinbras’s existence as a shadowy commercial entity on in-flight television and to prompt Hamlet’s Q2 ‘how all occasions do inform

³⁴⁹ Hatchuel, p. 4.

against me' soliloquy (4.4.9.1-56 – see inset box). Whilst he speaks aloud, no-one on the plane notices or comments – further reinforcing his alienation. The

Lines retained
4.4 (9.1)
4.4 (9.4)
4.4 (9.22-9.36)
4.4 (9.43-9.49)
4.4 (9.55-56)

choice of an aeroplane is an interesting development given that the locations Hamlet finds himself in have often reflected his inner mind. His private rooms were shambolic and disorganised; the Laundromat whirling and turning; and

now all around him is immobility and indolence - with the exception of a wide-eyed child with its mother – perhaps an exemplar of the innocence and love he has lost. At the end of the soliloquy (4.4.9.43-56) Hamlet looks at himself in the mirror, unmediated by the camera. He now seems to realise that he must take action and that he cannot look to media models, it must come from within him.

Lines retained
4.5 (17-22)
4.5 (27-34)
4.5 (36)
4.5 (40)
4.5 (45-46)
4.5 (51-54)
4.5 (66-70)
4.5 (65)
4.5 (113-120)
4.5 (124)
4.5 (126-129)
4.5 (131-136)
4.5 (145-150)
4.5 (186-189)
4.5 (156-157)
4.5 (167-168)
4.5 (158-159)
4.5 (173-174)
4.5 (177-181)

With this, the action moves back to Ophelia and the outworking of her father's death (4.5.17ff – see inset box, left). The Guggenheim, chosen as the setting for her madness to be expressed, is notable for its spiral design resembling 'a nautilus shell, with continuous spaces flowing freely one into another'.³⁵⁰ It is significant that the open spaces associated with Ophelia in her apartment are reprised here. This also forces Claudius and Gertrude to deal with Ophelia in public – they can no longer contain their affairs within a private space. Once again the subtext takes prominence over the words, with Gertrude's embarrassment at the spectacle of madness being played out in a public

space being the foremost issue – Ophelia's care is of secondary importance, a

³⁵⁰ <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/about/frank-lloyd-wright-building> accessed 22 June 2015.

fact conveyed by the way in which she is unceremoniously dragged away by a bodyguard. Spatial instability is then developed further by the unannounced arrival of the raging Laertes and the return of Ophelia – with the Guggenheim now operating like a dreamscape where characters appear without barrier or restraint. Ophelia, traumatised by the harsh realities of the outside world has retreated back into her private world of photographic reproduction, as Laertes enfolds her in an awkward embrace that cannot help recall the earlier example (see 1.3) of a family that struggles to express its love physically.

Almeryda then uses the final line of 4.5 (line 213, ‘where the offence lies let the great axe fall’) to accomplish a fluid spatial transfer to the safer,

Lines retained	
4.5 (213)	private rooms of the hotel (see inset box, left). The line
4.7 (1-7)	is spoken out loud without anyone listening. Laertes
4.7 (11-16)	arrives and the visual separation of the men from
4.7 (25-35)	Gertrude visualises the gulf developing between man
4.7 (38)	and wife, whilst the layout of the open-plan room
4.7 (41-46)	becomes not a source of freedom but restriction; will
4.7 (50-53)	they be overheard by Gertrude as they plot Hamlet’s
4.7 (59)	death?
4.7 (61-66)	
4.7 (89-91)	
4.7 (95.1-95.10)	
4.7 (96-97)	
4.7 (134-136)	
4.7 (156)	

Unlike Shakespeare’s syuzhet there is no need

for Claudius to suggest that Laertes corroborates his version of events (4.5.196-212 is cut) or any discussion of poisoning (4.7.99-133 are cut). This is a transactional world, devoid of outward emotion where Laertes is a willing pawn moved into position with little persuasion. He is given a gun in what is reminiscent of a police evidence bag; an unsophisticated solution in a ruthless commercial world. Despite its chronological adherence to line order (see inset

box, above), the cutting here removes the emotional complexity of Shakespeare's syuzhet (where Claudius is driven by the threat of unrestrained madness returned to Denmark), or of the spontaneity of Zeffirelli's arrangement that keeps the plot developing until the very end. Here the gun is exchanged wordlessly and the suspense downplayed. The final moment, Gertrude revealing Ophelia's death, eschews the long 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook' speech (4.7.137-154) and cuts to an overhead shot of Ophelia drowned in a fountain (01:24:02). The image mirrors the drawing that she did for Hamlet in an early scene (00:04:02): the lovers' prospective meeting place now transformed into a place of death and ruined love, with Hamlet's love poems strewn across the water.

The Second Act Turning Point to the Climax

What now becomes obvious is that whilst there was relatively moderate cutting in the third section of the story (68%), in the final section 8 out of every 10 words are cut: a proportion that increases to over 9 in every 10 words for scene 5.1 (see Table below). This leads to a degree of narrative incoherence as will be discussed shortly.

HAMLET (2000)

	5.1	5.2	Total
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	2254	3148	5402
<i>Hamlet</i> (2000)	194	844	1038
<i>Percentage cut</i>	92%	73%	81%
<i>Hamlet</i> (Norton)	2254	3148	5402
<i>Hamlet</i> (1990)	525	868	1393
<i>Percentage cut</i>	77%	72%	74%

In terms of scene intercutting, because the plot to kill Hamlet is simplified and

Scene Intercutting from the Second Act Turning Point to the Climax
5.1 5.2

left in the order that it is found in the Shakespearean syuzhet (see inset box), there is no scene intercutting of the type seen in Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* and also in Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. There is, in fact, one

element taken from an earlier scene (3.2), but this is placed as an Epilogue after the final scene. As a result the question then becomes what is dramatised in the final section of the film and is there extensive rearrangement of the events and/or the lines?

As mentioned above, scene 5.1 is cut by 92% and the impact can clearly be seen. In fact, of the 284 lines in the scene, the first 227 are cut and only 30 of the remaining 57 are used (see inset box). The sequence begins with an invented

Lines retained
NON-SHAKESPEAREAN DIALOGUE
5.1 (228-229)
5.1 (210-212)
5.1 (217-218)
5.1 (221-222)
5.1 (226)
5.1 (223)
5.1 (233-236)
5.1 (238-241)
5.1 (243)
5.1 (254-256)
5.1 (259-262)
5.1 (247)
5.1 (274-275)

scene: Hamlet arriving at the airport in New York.

An audience trying to process how he has managed this might find it puzzling. This issue, I would argue, is a function of the setting. In Zeffirelli's film it is accepted that the resourceful man of action in a 12th/13th Century setting just found a way back. In the Shakespearean syuzhet letters to Horatio and Claudius are also sufficient to prompt acceptance of his return. Here, although Claudius receives a fax, in the equivalent of 4.7, the paraphernalia of modern

life complicate the processing of his return. Banal questions proliferate: how did he get off the plane in England, where are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, how did he get a new flight, how did Horatio know to meet him and why, most

importantly, do they go to the cemetery? These events are easily explicable in the Shakespearean *syuzhet* and in Zeffirelli's rendering, but this is *artistic* motivation: it is present for its own sake without any need for explanation.

The issue that this technique promulgates is that the sequence sends the audience backwards trying to find answers to these questions – has something been missed? This impedes comprehension of the present action. Of course the question of how he changes the commission is subsequently answered in the following scene as a flashback – putting to one side any objection about computer passwords of course! However, this scene causes a degree of disorientation in the viewer that makes the story slightly more difficult to comprehend. One objection to these comments might be that Almereyda was being deliberately obscure here. However, his own words would seem to contradict this, when he writes that many ideas were 'sacrificed for the sake of clarity and momentum'.³⁵¹ Here I would suggest that whilst he achieves momentum it is at the expense of narrative clarity.

The first part of this scene (from a textual perspective) was cut because the tone did not feel right to Almereyda post-filming. Looking at the screenplay it is clear that Almereyda never planned to use the device of Yorick's skull, via which an audience discovers an intimate detail about Hamlet's youth – this is a logical choice, given that the tone of the film is one of alienation and dislocation.³⁵² However, the decision to cut lines 5.1.1-209 does rob the story of Hamlet's reflections on life and death that are central to the play. Given

³⁵¹ Michael Almereyda and William Hamlet Shakespeare, *William Shakespeare's Hamlet*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. xii.

³⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 106-9.

Almereyda's original intention to include this section it must be seen as more accidental than purposeful.

The scene then concludes with a brief contretemps next to Ophelia's grave and finishes with Hamlet leaving – revealing very little that is new and barely covering the scene's main event (witnessing the death of Ophelia and returning to threaten Claudius). This scene crystallizes the essential issue that is emerging. The setting of the story works closely in concert with the edited syuzhet and raises questions based on a range of schemata – prototype, template and procedural. The audience then uses these schemata to hypothesise about how they might best fill in any narrative gaps. For example, in Chapter Two it became clear that certain behaviours are normalised in the semi-imaginary setting of *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) that would be out of place in either Almereyda's or Zeffirelli's settings: these might include the exaggerated actions of Capulet, his wife, the Nurse, Tybalt or Mercutio. These latter examples are made normative by the combination of generic expectations (part-Spaghetti Western, part comic book), the mise-en-scene with its eccentric dress codes, the exaggerated religious iconography and the embedding of the Shakespearean text on buildings and in magazines. Zeffirelli's 12th/13th Century setting however, is the best comparison here because in the same scene (5.1) he cuts 77% of the text and only uses 300 more words than Almereyda – yet the scene is much more coherent as a narrative for the following reasons:

1. Hamlet has been seen manipulating the messages on board ship and an audience can accept that he found his way back (it is the 13th Century)
2. It is understandable that Hamlet would return to the castle on horseback.

3. It would make sense that bodies are buried outside the castle but not too far distant; there is no alternative hypothetical model for burials near a castle that would lead most people to question this practice.
4. It is perfectly logical that Hamlet could pass such a graveyard.
5. Hamlet sees Yorick's skull and although death and the insignificance of human ambitions is minimised, it is mentioned.
6. A burial within the castle has been seen, but that was for royalty: Ophelia does not fall into that category and has committed suicide, so a low-key burial outside is understandable.

In other words, the audience can fill most of the narrative gaps in Zeffirelli's version using a range of schemata. One can imagine that the same would have been the case had Almereyda's setting been different (for example the Old West). The only event that would be different from Zeffirelli's concept would then be the fact that Yorick's skull is not featured.

Having moved quickly through scene 5.1, the action now moves to the equivalent of scene 5.2, where Hamlet now recounts how he condemned Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – but not how he escaped per se (5.2.4-79 – see inset box, below). Again, in Zeffirelli's version this escape is just accepted and in Shakespeare's *syuzhet* it is explained. Hamlet then accepts the King's challenge to fight Laertes – delivered by fax (5.2.108 and 122-26). The shorthand again leaves gaps that are very difficult to fill for the Shakespearean neophyte: what does 'a dozen passes' mean (5.2.122) or the wager that 'he shall not exceed you three hits' (5.2.123) – three hits at what? Of course if one is familiar with the play – or perhaps fencing – then these gaps can be easily bridged. If not, they remain meaningless. However, Hamlet does here have the opportunity to refuse

the invitation, but doesn't. One difference is that he is asked twice in the play – once by Osric and once by another lord; in the film there is just one request. This is another example where the redundancy of the play, which motivates a sense of realism, is not reproduced in the film.

It is also notable that Almereyda here brings back the Ghost – this time silent – to oversee the final decision. In terms of textual cutting what is now

Lines retained
5.2 (4-5)
5.2 (6-11)
5.2 (28-29)
5.2 (13-15)
5.2 (18-20)
5.2 (26)
5.2 (27)
5.2 (30)
5.2 (32-33)
5.2 (39)
5.2 (45)
5.2 (47)
5.2 (57-63)
5.2 (64-65)
5.2 (68-69)
5.2 (72-79)
5.2 (108)
5.2 (122-126)
5.2 (128-129)
5.2 (146.14)
5.2 (148)
5.2 (149-150)
5.2 (155-161)
5.2 (161)

obvious is that Almereyda has departed from his earlier practice (of using relatively long sections of text) and moved to very short snippets. This denudes the qualitative aspect of the language but is what might be expected in a film and no different from Zeffirelli. However, it does mean that there is no real sense of Hamlet's gradual progression and acceptance of his Fate. This, as seen in *Romeo+Juliet*, when Juliet takes the poison, is an issue in these adaptations. Where Shakespeare uses dialogue to verbalise the mental steps that a character might reasonably rehearse before taking a momentous step, the films must replace this with character traits. In Zeffirelli the gaps are bridged (in part) by Gibson's transtextual action-man personality –

he is the type of character who will fight given a reasonable invitation to do so. Almereyda's Hamlet is the opposite – here his nihilistic 'slacker' personality motivates acceptance because he does not care whether he lives or dies. Of course the problem that then arises is why should the viewer care?

Having appeared to eschew the poisoning plot by omitting text from 5.1, Almereyda now creates a brief montage sequence that begins with Claudius (in private) poisoning a glass of wine. A wordless scene in Hamlet's private space then follows, where, in an invented moment, he removes the images that he had been using to stimulate and inspire him. He is divesting himself of the images that have sustained his hopes of a life outside of the confines of Claudius's commercialised world – foreshadowing a sense of closure and finality.

The story now moves quickly to the final confrontation with Claudius and Laertes. Here Almereyda uses just 56 lines of the 160 available, choosing 21 different snippets with substantial gaps between those selections (see inset box,

Lines retained	
5.2 (163-169)	below). This necessarily creates a fractured sense of
5.2 (178-181)	progression and is complicated by the setting and the
5.2 (191)	activity. Even in a film replete with spatial incongruities it is
5.2 (202-204)	difficult to process why the event takes place on a rooftop at
5.2 (193-201)	night. The space is very cramped and restricts the action –
5.2 (205)	such as it is. Another issue is the incongruence of a fencing
5.2 (216)	match – nothing in the film to-date has prepared the viewer
5.2 (218-219)	for this eventuality. Again, this creates questions rather than
5.2 (222-225)	focusing the viewer on the action. As noted many times in
5.2 (226-227)	this analysis, the delivery of the words is also systematically
5.2 (228-230)	undermined by the frequent cutaways that build a subtextual
5.2 (231-232)	tension. As Hamlet speaks Gertrude shoots glances at
5.2 (234)	
5.2 (237)	
5.2 (241-242)	
5.2 (244)	
5.2 (262-263)	
5.2 (280-282)	
5.2 (288-291)	
5.2 (300)	
5.2 (302-303)	

Claudius, as if to estimate what actions he might be contemplating; meanwhile when the camera does focus on Hamlet and Laertes, the latter seems oblivious to

the words – it is as if nothing is being spoken at all. In addition the camera position over Laertes' shoulder looks down on Hamlet, making him look like a little boy: thus reinforcing the sense that there has been no transformation in his state during the film. As the scene transpires Gertrude becomes aware of the poisoning plot and poisons herself deliberately. The denouement swiftly follows when Laertes pulls a gun, shoots Hamlet and then gets shot himself. In an unlikely twist, the previously taciturn Laertes feels obliged to tell Hamlet that Claudius is 'to blame' (5.2.263). The King is swiftly despatched by Hamlet who shows a near miraculous ability to fire a gun accurately when mortally wounded.

A brief black and white flashback sequence then apes *Romeo+ Juliet* as a reminder of select events in the plot but focuses on Hamlet's love for Ophelia – beginning with her face and ending with a kiss. This is a story of their tragedy – a couple kept apart by a ruthlessly commercial world that has lost the ability to function or support feelings of community and true love. It is a world where images mean everything and words mean nothing. As Horatio is seen leaning over the body and intoning how noble Hamlet was, there is a sense that meaning is now collapsing – the word noble has lost its meaning: how could a nihilist, slacker who failed to have any consistent or admirable character traits be categorised as noble? Or is it perhaps Almereyda's way of communicating that what is spoken today has little meaning? In one final flourish of spatial and temporal inconsistency, the camera moves away to a sky that has miraculously lightened as a plane streaks away.

This is a climactic scene that results in something not far from farce instead of tragedy. The only saving grace is that Fortinbras does not appear by helicopter to witness this scene – as was planned in the screenplay. Fortinbras's

absence is, however, one of the reasons that Almereyda felt the scene worked less well than hoped. I would argue that, on the contrary, had Fortinbras arrived by helicopter it would have raised a number of questions: how would he have known to be there at that precise moment (not to mention where would he have landed)? Almereyda approached Miramax with a proposal to reshoot this part of the scene but they refused to fund it. In short, the last sequence itself falls victim to the narration's inconsistent approach to textual cutting and spatial strategy.

The final moments are then spoken by a newscaster (see inset box below) and are a mix of the lines Fortinbras would have spoken plus lines delivered by the Player King:

This quarry cries on havoc. O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck!
Our wills and Fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.
(5.2.308-11, 3.2.193-5)

This device has similarities to Luhrmann's closing for *Romeo+Juliet*, which

Lines retained
5.2 (308-311) 3.2 (193-195)

Tatspauh describes as 'the bleak image of a flickering, unwatched television set'.³⁵³ What, speculated Tatspauh, happened to the viewer of that television at the end of *Romeo + Juliet* – did they find the story too painful to

watch or were they unmoved? What then is the narrative function of the

³⁵³ Tatspauh in Jackson, p. 149.

television in Almereyda's film? A direct address to the audience is delivered by a voice that represents the type of media corporation that the film argues imprisons us; a mix of lines from two characters and two different positions in the play stitched together; in short, the ending is a microcosm of Almereyda's approach to the film: 'not so much a sketch, but a collage, a patchwork of intuitions, images and ideas'.³⁵⁴ That this is the stated goal is one thing; to what degree it is possible for a viewer to then take this collage (by nature a static piece of work) and use the tools of narrative comprehension to interpret it as a meaningful story in space and time is quite another.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the syuzhet rearrangement, in contrast to Zeffirelli, there are not substantial changes to the overall order. Looking back at the key events identified earlier, Almereyda does retain many of them (marked in bold):

- 1. The sighting of the Ghost by Horatio and the decision to tell Hamlet (1.1)**
- 2. Gertrude's decision to request that Hamlet stays in Denmark (1.2)**
- 3. The decision by Polonius to restrict Ophelia's access to Hamlet (1.3)**
4. Hamlet's decision to put on an 'antic disposition' (1.5)
- 5. The decision to send Hamlet to England (3.3)**
- 6. Hamlet's decision to kill the person behind the arras, which happened to be Polonius but might have been Claudius (3.4)**
- 7. Claudius's decision to have Hamlet executed (4.3)**
- 8. The announcement of Hamlet's return to Denmark (4.7)**

³⁵⁴ Almereyda and Shakespeare, p. xii.

9. Hamlet's decision to announce his presence at the graveside (5.1)

10. Hamlet's decision to accept the challenge to fight Laertes (5.2)

11. Hamlet's decision to kill Claudius

In terms of the satellites, Almereyda decides to keep three of the seven noted here:

1. Claudius's decision to deal with the threat from Fortinbras (1.2)

2. Polonius sending Reynaldo to spy on Laertes (2.1)

3. The arrival of the players (2.2)

4. Hamlet meeting the forces of Fortinbras on the plain (4.4)

5. Hamlet's discussion with the gravediggers (5.1)

6. Hamlet's decision to leap into the grave and fight Laertes (5.1)

7. Fortinbras assuming control of Denmark (5.2)

Looking at these in order, the deletion of the text where Hamlet vows to 'put an antic disposition on' (1.5.173) makes it difficult to justify why Polonius talks about his madness. In addition, the retention of Fortinbras in a corporate role makes it difficult to portray that character meaningfully – he is normally defined by warfare and these references are deleted. He then becomes a cipher and it is difficult to understand why he is any threat or why he should be an example that prompts Hamlet to say 'how occasions do inform against me'.

However, what is apparent is that Almereyda does include many of the main events and thus it cannot be the case that these events alone constitute the 'fabula'. For that more information is required to fill in the narrative gaps – in other words a New York setting in this film cues the use of fewer useful schemata than a 12th/13th Century setting in Zeffirelli's.

This chapter does not argue that Almereyda must follow certain rules but does suggest that his self-confessed collage film does not operate as effectively as Hamlet's film-within-the-film (at least from a mainstream narrative perspective). In Hamlet's film-within-the-film the associations can be deduced: a happy family; a poisoner kills the archetypal father; the death affects the wider society (the collapsing rows of men); the poisoner seduces the woman, turning her from a loving wife into a sex-mad whore before he claims the crown of the rightful king. The same degree of narrative clarity – an overt goal of Almereyda's – is not present in the longer film.

CONCLUSION

This research project set out to explore the ways in which narrative theory could shed light on the process by which early modern drama is reshaped for the cinema. What has been demonstrated is that it illuminates the changes made to the fabula and syuzhet of Shakespeare's plays in a number of different ways. First, narrative theory offers a means of reflecting on the basic statistics extracted via *Final Draft* and providing insights into how and why the changes to Acts and Scenes have been made. These range from macro-scale changes through to the impact of various camera angles on moment-by-moment interactions.

The project explores two different methods of assessing the interpretational consequences of these changes. In Chapters Two and Three the analysis of *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Tempest* (2010) focuses on the macro-scale changes and then subdivides the characters into plot-related groups. This method allows an assessment of the traits that these various characters possess and the broad themes that Luhrmann and Taymor privilege, compared to those that are either minimised or excised. The second half of the project then takes a more detailed line-by-line approach, comparing two different film versions of *Hamlet*, focusing more on what is retained rather than what is cut. This comparative exercise achieves two outcomes. The first is the ability to assess the way that different ways of combining the syuzhet and cinematic style reveal significant differences between the films and the source text (in this case *Hamlet*). The second is the way a combination of close textual analysis and the reading of individual shots in a given film illuminate the way in which key relationships can be changed.

CONCLUSION

What, however, do these findings add to scholarship in the field of Shakespeare on Film? At one level it is the degree of detail that is available about the location and type of cuts that will be useful in assessing both large- and small-scale changes to the plays. It is not argued that this information does not exist to some degree, but that this project offers a greater level of detail – for example, when Russell Jackson mentions that filmmakers have problems with beginnings and endings, this project has highlighted very specifically what some of those issues are and what steps were taken to resolve them.

Another insight was the general conservatism with which the syuzhet is handled, despite the concept allowing for considerable flexibility in the presentation of events. It is clear that, on the whole, the films analysed tend to retain the general order of the events in the play in chronological order and make only moderate use of analepses and prolepses to create suspense and curiosity. This is partly due to the premise that when a narrative is presented out of chronological order the viewers must expend more mental energy and capacity reordering those events; this, in turn, risks them losing track of what is happening in real time. As Bordwell points out, this is probably why ‘most films avoid temporal reshuffling’.³⁵⁵

From a macro-perspective, it is also clear that where cuts affect what might be regarded as kernels (or key branching points where decisions are made), the effect is to strain narrative coherence. One such example is Almereyda’s choice to cut Hamlet’s decision to put on an ‘antic disposition’, a kernel that was included in the original screenplay but not the film.³⁵⁶ This changes the characterisation of Hamlet and also has ramifications for the rest of the story,

³⁵⁵ Bordwell, p. 33.

³⁵⁶ Almereyda and Shakespeare, p. 34.

CONCLUSION

leading to a degree of confusion when characters question the reasons for a madness that is not announced or particularly visible. In addition, the concept of satellites throws light on areas that may not have been structurally necessary to build the fabula (the events as they are reconstructed in chronological order), but do affect the aesthetic quality of the story – Juliet's reflections on death being just one example.

At the micro-scale the degree and subtlety with which the syuzhet can be reordered in films for different effects is of great interest. In Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, the basis for a closer mother/son relationship and the exploration of a Freudian dimension is created by the decision to make Gertrude's meeting with her son (in 1.2) completely private (without Claudius). In comparison the Shakespearean syuzhet makes this a public spectacle (embarrassing Claudius and drawing a rebuke), whilst Almereyda's arrangement includes Claudius as a remote observer of a child-like Hamlet. Another example is that of the relatively powerless Ophelia in Zeffirelli's period version of *Hamlet* being given a degree of independence that is communicated by the camera preferring her reaction rather than her brother's advice. In comparison, although the camera follows Ophelia in the same scene in Almereyda's *Hamlet*, the effect renders her a muted prisoner – despite being placed in a modern setting.

This subtle manipulation of syuzhet and style over time also facilitates changes in the character development of Ophelia in the two films of *Hamlet*. Helena Bonham-Carter's Ophelia is established early in the syuzhet as a happy young woman, but by sub-dividing her appearances into smaller scenes, Zeffirelli makes her mental breakdown more credible as the viewer watches her being exposed to a variety of humiliations and rejections that accrue gradually

CONCLUSION

over time. In comparison, Julia Stiles' Ophelia, even carrying the transtextual echoes of assertive female roles, is systematically muted and infantilised, making her public suicide a statement that physicalizes her emotional and mental incarceration. These interpretive observations reinforce H. Porter Abbott's view that one of the main differences between film and other narrative media is 'the degree to which the presence of visual imagery absorbs attention'.³⁵⁷

Moving on to the concepts of schemata and their use in bridging narrative gaps, when a large proportion of the dialogue is cut, a combination of the setting and character traits then become more important in allowing the viewer to span any narrative gaps that occur. This concept highlights particular issues with Almereyda's film when it is sometimes difficult to assimilate behaviours in a modern setting where spatial consistency is eschewed. This produces a rather counter-intuitive situation where it is easier to bridge the narrative gaps in Zeffirelli's 12th/13th Century Denmark than in Almereyda's 20th Century New York. As a result, prototype and template schemata are less useful when analysing Almereyda's film. This means that it is often necessary to fall back on one of the four sets of procedural schemata to try to identify character motivations, namely compositional (relevance to the story), realistic (plausibility in the real world), transtextual (typical of a particular genre irrespective of its plausibility), or artistic (it is present for its own sake, without explanation).

This dissertation also shows that, while recent critical studies downplay the role of the implied author, this function is central even to a medium like film, whose production relies on cooperative, semi-industrial processes. My analysis more specifically assesses the impact of assumptions and attitudes to the work of

³⁵⁷ Abbott, p. 79.

CONCLUSION

Julie Taymor, who has a particularly strong set of authorial attributes: namely she is viewed as extremely creative and experimental. The tendency to see her in this light obscures the fact that, whilst she is visually inventive, her attitude to syuzhet reordering is relatively conservative. This tendency in turn leads to her being criticised for a lack of creativity on *Tempest*: a view which I suggest is unfair because she is merely following a pattern of respecting the Shakespearean syuzhet that is effective on *Titus* but is perhaps less effective with a play not as well suited to mainstream film structure norms.

These findings justify Suzanne Keen's observation that 'Narrative theory provides an extremely detailed vocabulary for the description of the component parts and various functions of narrative'.³⁵⁸ This project accordingly highlights the macro- and micro-changes that Shakespeare's narratives undergo in the hands of various filmmakers, and the degree of mental effort these changes demand of their audiences.

The Future

One of the most exciting aspects of this project involves testing my approach with students, predominantly at undergraduate level, but also with mature students who return to education specifically to pursue their interest in Shakespeare. My approach helps students explore how Shakespeare constructed his stories and how a close study of structural, textual and narratological variation can lend a fresh insight into the fictive world of his plays.

More generally, this project provides a method of reaching new audiences for the plays due to its capacity to highlight macro-scale overviews of the changes, in tandem with highly detailed comparisons between the plays and the

³⁵⁸ Keen, p. 6.

CONCLUSION

films. The aim is to explore the way Shakespeare tells his stories by comparing them to film storytelling and even TV series – which use many of the same types of devices. This idea has already been piloted at King's College London via their yearly Summer School for students since 2013, where I teach students from inner-city state schools. However, I also intend to explore ways of putting the film texts that I have transcribed as part of this project into an online digital resource. This resource would allow students to compare the changes first-hand for themselves. Finally, colleagues from the Department of Digital Humanities and from the Widening Participation Team have indicated that I should develop my project into a Massive Online Open Course (or MOOC) aimed at a universal audience and this option will be pursued in the near future, given the enhanced level of interest in Shakespeare that is almost certain to occur in 2016.

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